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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

Volume I December 1934 Number 5

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The Editor will be glad to consider stories offered for publication and will endeavour to return unsuitable manuscripts when they are accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. He will take no responsibility for the loss of manuscripts.

All communications should be sent to the Manager of The Short Story, Triplicane, Madras.

The annual subscription is Re. I-8 as., post free to any address in India. Foreign, 6s. or 2 $. The advertisement rates may be obtained on application to the Manager.

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The Short Story is published in the first week of every month. We shall be glad to review Fiction in its pages. Books for review should reach the office at least *four weeks* before the date of publication of the Magazine.

Printed at The "Sound & Shadow Press" & Published by the Proprietor, "The Short Story," Triplicane, Madras.

AN APPRECIATION

Dr. R. Naga Raja Sarma, M.A., L.T., Ph. D. writes :—

Journalism is a western institution. While Indian Journalism has retained intact all the worst features of its occidental model, the good features thereof like independence of judgment, liberty of expression of opinion, fearless comment on the acts of powers that be without reacting to fear and anticipations of favour *et hoc* stand eliminated from the said Indian Journalism. Influential journals are pre-eminently commercial. Others are sensation-mongers with empty coffers.

Manjeri Isvaran's journal "Short Story" is neither commercial nor sensation-mongering. His short stories afford the necessary escape, albeit for the nonce, from dull routine and tedium vitate of life and existence. I have read many of them with interest. They may not be thrillers exactly. Nor do they reach the extreme of pornographical portraiture painfully prominent in present day fiction. Mr Manjeri Isvaran and his contributors have, I believe, cultivated the knack of keeping to the golden mean in story-telling.

I notice also the didactic element is kept alive wherever necessary. For instance, the story "The Wisdom of a Lie" appearing in the October issue, 1934, is a comment on social conditions that allow young girls being given in marriage to old sinners. Or again, " A Noble Mistress " in the same issue shows that the so-called fallen women have sedate sentiments like love to a single individual etc. The story entitled " Revelation " is a legitimate condemnation of superstitious pilgrimages and the utter moral untrustworthiness of the temple priests like the Elder. I need not multiply such nice instances. But I would like to offer the following comment on " Breaking the Rod " in the November number. Of course, the erring Barrister was taught a lesson, I take it, but what happened to poor Sarada the story-teller does not tell us. Did the story-teller marry her and prove to be a hygienic husband for the medical-graduate wife ? !!! I rather think in situations like this, a psychological rounding off is essential. Sarada must have found a husband after her heart, and after all sure as anything the Barrister must have found a wife after his heart too.

I do not know if Mr Manjeri Isvaran has burnt his fingers over his " Short Story " venture. I commend his attractive journal to the public for systematic patronage. As a practical philosopher belonging to the exalted school of Realism, I would implore story-tellers to desist from incorporating cinema-kisses and kindred demonstrations in needlessly strong colours as they constitute slavish imitation of western fiction-literature against which I believe a protest has to be lodged not on grounds of silly prudery or of pseudo-puritanism but of mental health.

I congratulate Mr Manjeri Isvaran on his literary venture and I hope the New Year will see the " Short Story" enjoy a popular and prosperous career.

TRIPLICANE, R. NAGA RAJA SARMA

December, 15, 1934.

the WHISPERING GALLERY of LIFE & LETTERS

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible place
Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—

COLERIDGE

It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—

WORDSWORTH

Sir Henry Royce

AMONG the famous men of the twentieth century the late Sir Henry Royce will have an honoured place. He started life as a mechanic in the workshop of the Great Northern Railway at Peterborough ; in his early twenties he set up independent business as a maker of electrical fittings ; he was forty when he started on the road that led him to fame and wealth. The incidents in the life of this 'England's Greatest Mchanic' are vividly narrated by Sir Max Pemberton in "The Life of Sir Henry Royce" (Hodder and Stougton, 18s.). Henry Ford who has all the world in the map of his mind manufactured a cheap car ; Henry Royce set to work on a car that should be the best in the world, an aristocrat every inch. It was in 1904 that the first Royce Car was ready ; it attracted instant attention and won the all-round approbation that it travelled with 'splendid ease'. Lord Northcliffe called it 'an advertisement for British engineering and British efficiency surpassing any other that we had.' The Rolls-part in the name of the car is interesting to know. Rolls took no part in the manufacturing of the car; he managed the business side of it splendidly. He was the Hon. Charles Rolls, son af a peer and an aeroplane pilot ; he died when his partnership with Royce was only six years old.

Henry Royce was very proud of his car and when on the road he could not bear to be overtaken by a car of any other make. A story is told that when he fell ill in the South of France and was rushed to England passing Toulon, a car dashed past, and though terribly sick, he looked out and sank back on his seat sighing happily, 'It's all right. It's one of ours.'

Rapidly did Henry Royce make money; 'within ten years his car was known to the uttermost parts of the earth. Americans drove the car with pride, South Americans sought them, Indian Maharajahs were among their

earlier users. You saw them at Calcutta, you drove in them in Florida, they welcomed you at the Cape.'

Henry Royce died in 1932 after a hard and strenuous life and Sir Max Pemberton's record of this is rich, fluent, and beautifully subdued.

Mr J. J. Bell

DEATH occurred recently of Mr J. J. Bell, author and journalist. In lighter fiction his name was one of the most distinguished; his was a success, silent but deep. He had about fifty books to his credit when he died; his "Wee Macgreegor" is still one of the best-sellers. "Hamish" was another of his successes and his recent book "The Glory of Scotland" widened his public. In 1932 he published his autobiograghy, "I Remember", a really valuable addition to the library in this branch of literature. Mr Bell was sixty-three at the time of his death.

Not A Wallflower

MRS CATHARINE AMY DAWSON SCOTT, poet and novelist, died early last month. She claims to be remembered as the founder of the P. E. N. Club and of the Women's Defence Relief (during the War), an organisation for training women to replace men called to the Colours.

"Vanessa"

A HEALTHY outlook (?) on life is shown by the Hollywood directors of late in picturising the works of officially-acknowledged authors. Mr Hugh Walpole who went to Hollywood to play the part of a clergyman in the film version of "David Copperfield" is to adapt his own novel "Vanessa", shortly.

Young Oxford Authors

SPEAKING at the Oxford University Club Mr Philip Guedalla expressed that young Oxford authors would get their work easily printed but not published. He himself had experienced considerable difficulty in getting his writings published when he was up at Balliol. The occupation of the modern kitchenwench, he said, was writing, successful writing; this really is no complement to the literary young men.

ROOM No. 13

By M. CHALAPATHI RAU

ROOM No. 13 of the Desabandhu, Hotel, Luna Square, Calcutta, was notorious for its idle inhabitant. But one day I woke up early and dived down the staircase into the Proprietor's office.

Basu was there already, poring over the morning paper.

'Good morning, Basu,' I said.

But Basu remained cold and impassive; and when Basu remained cold and impassive I knew something was brewing in the air.

'What is the matter, Basu?' I persisted like an early bore that catches the worm. Basu laid the paper before me, and turned away his face. My eyes stared icily at the glaring headlines which announced the historic MacAdam murder.

'Another of these insane assassinations. A dastardly crime against humanity,' I muttered.

The Proprietor nodded pompously. 'It is no good,' he said, 'it will strengthen our enemies.'

'Strengthen your enemies! Dash it,' burst in Basu. 'But there is no arguing with mollycoddles. You are bugs. You are lice. You are sucking the blood of our country. You are cowards!'

The Proprietor shrugged his shoulders, lifted his eyebrows and stared pompously at Basu.

I was on the top of a crisis. I could not bear it. 'I have heard enough of this war-talk, my friend,' I put in. 'We are cowards because we will not kill. You are great men because you are murderers.'

'No wonder. I did not expect anything better from a rice-eater.' That was Basu's usual bolt against Madrasis; and I always took it as an insult to my person. So I parried.

'I may be a rice-eater. But you belong to a nation of lotus-eaters.'

'You are mud-souled parrots. You have not even the cheek to talk; and you will reap what others have sown.' That was his latest insult. My blood curdled within me and pounded at my heart.

'This is nothing new to me. I know you from your skin downwards. Your geography is made up of swamps. Your history is a filthy record of assassinations. Your patriotism is provincial. You are a nation of sub-patriots. When a Bengalee talks of dying for his country, he means he will die for Bengal.' I was amazed at my own eloquence. I was in one of my rare rhetorical moods. Basu was sullen and fierce; he cowered before me like a baited bear. But soon he was smiling disconcertingly.

'I never thought you had so much eloquence or so many epigrams in your head. I do not, however, grant your premiss. A nation or an individual, I can recognise. But a sub-nation? Oh, never.'

He seemed to yawn more than speak. I must here confess that whenever I am worked up to a white heat of emotion I feel for the moment feverish; and though that is the only thing that can make me argue brilliantly it also sometimes makes me ignore things and persons. I ignored Basu. I hated him for arguing against me. Basu, I thought, was an irrational beast.

'Come on, Bob,' he said. I was Bob, Sonny, Charlie, even Old Bean to him. 'Let us not lose our heads. Anyhow you are too clever for me.' Basu was regaining his irresistible charm. I was once more in his grip. We began to sip our coffee. The Proprietor, who looked like a cross between a marwari and an American millionaire, smiled sinisterly.

'It is unlucky.'

'What is unlucky?'

Basu pointed to the number on the doorway of my room. It was 13. He lived in the next room. We were now in the corridor on the third floor of our hotel, which had the air of an ancient monument.

'I don't care a rap for it. I don't believe in numbers either as science or as superstition,' I said.

'Nor I. I haven't read Cheiro on numbers. That is remarkable.'

'Poor old Cheiro!'

'I mean it. I haven't read any of Cheiro's books. In these days when the world is overflowing with undergraduate poets and palmists. I say it is remarkable because if I cannot be anything else I intend becoming a palmist. Of the gentleman crook type.'

'Or a minor poet of the twentieth century.' That was the fate which I dreaded most.

'Or of any other century,' corrected Basu, not to be outstripped in the race for epigrams. We lapsed into a rumbling silence, for both of us were poets full of pity for our future.

I hope the editor of these memories will allow me to describe the beginnings of my friendship with Basu. We had first met in Delhi at the Competitive Examination for the Indian Civil Service. He seemed to be as lazy and languid as myself. We met in occasional *tete-a-tete*, and quoted profusely from our own unpublished poetry, I from my sonorous and ornate sonnets and he from his irregular Pindaric odes and unfinished epic on the dance of Death. I sincerely called him a genius, and he as sincerely said I was another. We had a passion for poetry, cricket, and Bernard Shaw. We loved the civilisation of the Incas and the latest lady Channel swimmers. Our heroes were Chengez Khan, Havelock Ellis, and Tu Fu, the greatest Chinese poet. We cared little for the examination, though we were sure we could get through with a little luck. As for the rest, who cared for it? We only wanted to assert our intellectual parity with what is supposed to be the cream of the most brilliant young men in the country. There have been stranger friendships but none so intense, yet so silent. We talked of everything except the affection that bound us. We spent soulful evenings under the auspices of the ghosts of the Moghul emperors. We wandered lazily in the desert palaces of Shajahan, now the seats of tommies and worm-empires. We roamed the vistas of the seven Delhis and climbed the Qutb which reared its head like a Sultan's dream. While others were studying we mooned about and dreamed away our days. And when we were tired of that ancient dust, fragrant with the blood of emperors, I accompanied Basu to Calcutta. My first object was to live in the shadow of my friend as much as possible, and my next was to study life in Bengal, as the hero of my projected novel was to be a Bengalee.

And here we were drifting into our endless chatter. It was the third month of our stay in Calcutta. We went and sat in my room.

'I will not publish one line of poetry hereafter,' he was saying.

'The world will not be the worse for it.' We loved this kind of banter. It emptied us of our emptiness. With all our differences we understood each other.

Basu began to sing "Rio Rita". He was a first-class mimic, and the world was full of "Rio Rita" in those days.

'It is five o'clock. We must attend the Congress meeting to condemn the MacAdam murder.' I was a kind of bulletin. Basu identified himself with the dreamy and idealist sections of the Congress. His patriotism was too poetic and heroic; it was intense; it was dangerous; and he proclaimed it openly. I was only a liberal in those glorious days when Basu made my days sparkling and divine.

Basu uttered curses. 'Chaney, I'm not coming.' He made fun of my

melancholic face by calling me Lon Chaney. 'Nor will I allow you to go. You are coming with me to the Elphinstone.'

And to the Elphinstone I went. We saw Garbo in her most exotic moods. I was a Garbo-fan.

'I prefer the Euthymol lady,' said Basu, while returning. 'Iam in love with her. I wonder why Fairbanks married Garbo.'

'Garbo is not married!' I was the better scholar.

'Oh, a virgin!'

*

When I woke up from my dream of Hollywood, I found Basu rocking in my chair and singing the latest talkie tunes.

'Good morning, Basu,' I said, still on my bed.

'Morning with a thousand spears, terrible in the east appears.'

'Good morning, Mr Laurence Binyon.' Basu was irritated. I have the nasty habit of immediately tracing up all quotations.

We dived down the staircase into the Proprietor's office.

'That is why I say we must co-operate with the Government. There is no other way out. The Congress may indulge in bluff. But the heart of the masses is sound. As Prof. Spearman would say.' The speaker was a portly gentleman with pleasant gestures. The audience was composed of stock-brokers, race course fans, and other remnants of the hotel. The Proprietor presided like a Buddha of the Mahayana School.

It was Basu that interrupted the speaker. 'May I know, sir, what you are? I suppose you are a professor of philosophy, attached to experimental psychology.'

'No, sir. I belong to a more prosaic business,' said the portly gentleman, lighting his cigar. 'And while I welcome any debate I should reject all kinds of insults.

'Well, Mr, if I may be permitted to call you professor of prose. May I know on whose behalf you are speaking. Is it on behalf of the country which ignores you or on behalf of the self which serves you.' Basu was deliberately rude.

The portly gentleman rose up heatedly. He clenched his fist, and said sneeringly: 'Well, sir, this is the golden age of self-conceit. You beat them all. Yet I hope even a bloated youth like you will emerge out.'

'Out of the chrysalis state of a crank into the butterfly state of a bore.' I was busy assessing Basu's brilliance. But the portly gentleman had walked out, and the audience was dispersing. I eargerly applied to the Proprietor for information. We were told our enemy was a prosperous insurance agent.

'Some cultural snob,' said Basu with scorn.

'You have wasted all your time,' I said.

'I do not mind it,' retorted Basu.

We had ignored an old bespectacled gentleman, peevishly crumpling the paper in his hand. Basu was still scowling like a storm and turned upon him.

'I suppose you are another.'

'What?'

'Another of those muckworms. A millionaire, a maharajah, a retired Colonel, an art-critic, or an insurance agent who will teach me my duties. An all-rounder of all sorts, stammering stupendous things, the glory that was Ind, some worm-eaten philosophy, with a renaissance touch.'

The old gentleman smiled inscrutably. 'Well, I do not know what you are driving at. But I happen to be a Professor of Art. My name is Kumar. And I come from Burdwan.'

'Professor Kumar of Burdwan! I am sorry, very sorry. This is my friend Mr—, a great man, not just yet, of course. When are we starting?' Basu had never mentioned Kumar to me.

'Immediately, if possible. I am put up in the Maidens Hotel. But I have to talk to you. If our friend does not mind.'

'Certainly not,' I said.

'Hard luck, Bob.'

'Cheerio!' I said, swimming up the staircase.

'Cheerio!' echoed Basu.

*

Basu was determined to leave Calcutta for a while. I could not leave him. But he swore that the matter was urgent, that I must trust him, and that he would write reams to me almost every day. The evening was to be an exciting gala experience for us.

'It is lovely,' I said when we were in the thick of the Buckingham gardens.

'I hate this sort of sentimental mush. Namby-pamby. Basu was cold and almost absent-minded.

'This is your eternal pose. I suppose when you die you will die with a paradox in your pocket and an epigrammatic lie on your lips. I hate you as much as I love you. When a man's heartline is weak and his headline broken, we may expect anything from him. It is, after all a crazy world,' I persisted. I am known for my slyness and supernatural cunning. But with Basu I was every moment frank, unaffected, and openly affectionate. He seemed to realise it, but in a heartless way.

'What is the use of your love or hate to me? I feel bored. I have fulfilled one-and-twenty summers. And what have I done? Nothing. Nothing. It is a tragedy of unfulfilment. I must do at least one great deed.'

'Or kiss a hundred girls or write a hundred books. That was the idea of Rupert Brooke.'

'He is not my hero. A silly fool who died to justify his sonnets.'

I was eclipsed by Basu. Whenever I feel unreservedly affectionate, I do not feel fit enough to argue or to show myself off. I fell on my golden reserves. 'Basu,' I pleaded, 'you may say whatever you like, man. You need not dedicate your works to me. You need not even read my poems. But have respect for my affection.'

He kept silent. I continued: 'You are getting unskinned, degenerate. You will find yourself a jolly good mug of flesh and blood, if you do not take a more human interest in life. You are too unconcerned about it. But I can see your bottom getting muddy and agitated. The sort of man that you are! You will dream of some Gonzalo's Commonwealth. You will swear by D. H. Lawrence. You will end by marrying Marie Stopes or dying of tuberculosis.'

'Many thanks. I suppose you will suggest homosexuality next. "For homosexual gods are rare, when women are fair, when women are fair."' He was quoting from me.

We walked among the gardens, dreamily, airily, dressed like popinjays, our suits blazing coolly in the shades, our evening hats sitting like noiseless birds on our wearily-titled heads. We sauntered like mysterious condottieri and glared like dare-devil world-tourists. I was silent and inconsolable. Basu drew himself into his shell of philosophic quiet.

*

Basu left Calcutta with Kumar. I plunged into the intensest work on my novel. The plot was rather woolly and long-winded, and everything depended on a proper hero. Basu was my model. He had every qualification, except one. As he said, he had not done any great deed. The greatest we had ever done was to sit for the Competitive Examination.

Basu was a fine athletic figure, a poet in his moods, an artist in his exquisite gestures, clean-shaven, and always trim and exquisite. He had a body, sensuous and languid, yet erect and agile; a head that had the poise and dignity of the Belvedere Apollo; eyes that had the brilliance of summer in them, a nose to which I cannot aspire. I envied his Byronic poses. His surface was brilliant,

though undernearth were lava and brimstone, mixed with melancholy.

I loved Basu as I have loved nobody else, and as I shall love nothing hereafter. He was to me what a bandit is to a schoolboy, a Greek god to a sculptor. I looked on him as a great composite picture of all the rest of my friends and the man, I think, I ought to be. I shared his sadness; I echoed his laughter. It was my ambition to live in his shadow, to be associated always with his life, which seemed to me a lovely poem.

*

Basu had been away for more than ten days. He had not written to me. I was getting restless, thinking that this friendship, like all my old ones, was a futility.

Late one night he burst in like a thunderstorm, and immediately took to his bed. I could not even see him. The door was immediately bolted.

Next morning we met outside my room. He was bright and serene, looking at the number of my room.

'I do not believe it,' I said.

'You always look like one motheaten or frostbitten.' Basu always put me on the defensive. I could not ask him why he had not written to me. He walked jauntily, and when Basu walked jauntily, he was not really jaunty. He was in one of his defeatist moods.

'I am feeling like a worm,' he said, and wriggled like a worm just to amuse me. I was not amused. I was sullen, and that was the first time I was ever sullen towards him. I am good at working myself into a pose and I wanted to be an impostor, just then.

He was flushed, almost angry. 'I am frustrated. I feel so old. It baffles me, this sense of frustration!'

I did not reply.

'You are a bug, a bug. You will suck me dry. Call yourself a friend? I cannot trust you. I cannot.' He ran into his room. I went into mine. He followed me. He looked sinister. I tried to smile.

'Call me a worm,' he said. 'Do you understand me? No, you do not. You are a bug.'

I tried to meet him majestically. I have never lacked the courage to deal with mad men. What was he to me, or I to him, after all? 'Bully,' I said, with serene assurance, 'you are mad. Why do you whine?'

'Whine?' he groaned, as he pulled out a pistol from the pocket of his trousers.

I did not retreat. I knew he would shoot me. I prepared to die courageously at the feet of the man I loved intensely. I could not think. My memory reeled. He was a monster. He was mad. But what could I do?

'Assassin,' I said rather voicelessly and grinned.

Basu's hand was steady, and his eyes glowed. There was neither bone nor nerve in me. I was one intense spurt of life. He was a slow motion picture of an assassin's fear.

We heard the tramp of booted feet. Basu left the pistol on my cot and stepped out. I heard voices and the sound of heavy boots. I peeped out.

A European gentleman, two elaborately dressed Police Inspectors, a serjeant, and a posse of constables, headed by the Proprietor had just climbed up the staircase. I put the pistol hastily under my bed and stepped out. I was nervous.

The Proprietor pointed Basu who was standing listlessly before his room. The European gentleman questioned him tortuously for an hour. The policemen searched his room intently and upturned everything. I was busy with a thousand thoughts, and the Proprietor grinned at me satanically. I sensed danger but saw no way out of it. At the worst, Basu might be related to some revolutionary, or they might search my room and find me guilty of possessing a stolen revolver.

They had finished. The European gentleman, who I realised belonged to the higher rungs of the C.I.D., saw me and asked me wherefrom I came. I told

him I belonged to Madras, and just when I was preparing myself for a fierce fusillade of questions and a very rude search they had turned away.

'Do you know this gentleman,' he asked me, pointing to Basu. It was his parting question.

'No,' I replied. My heart stood still. I can still remember the wink in the Proprietor's eye. It was a historic lie, which has been wiped out in blood.

Basu came close to me and caught my hand.

'You are great,' he spoke nervously, 'you have saved me from a mess.'

'But, Basu, whose is the pistol? I was very near a mess myself.'

'Never mind, Bob. It is a long story. Why not trust me?'

A thousand centuries seemed to unite us. I felt I was nurse and mother and brother to him. I could have kissed him for giving me that golden moment.

The evening papers announced the Barebone murder. It was sensational. The corpse of Barebone, District Magistrate of Mudnagar, was found in his bungalow riddled with bullets. The assassins were not traced. I had dim apprehensions. I wanted to disapprove of these brutalities and make some amends on behalf of my countrymen. I wanted to empty my soul to Basu. But he was not interested in the affair.

*

I was leaving for Madras. Basu gave me plenty of cakes and hot tea, by way of a send off, at the station. It all looks like a dream now. I lingered over each moment, as it slipped by. I made Basu laugh; I almost made him weep. We grew hysterical, even sentimental at times, tramping up and down the platform like dreamers, whispering like hollow men.

'What will you give me, if you get through the examination?' he asked, as the train was moving.

'Of course, I shall marry your daughter.' I tried to be witty, though I felt tragic at the separation.

'Splendid,' he was saying, smiling like a faun.

I sat in the train more like a dream-figure than a man. Tears rose to my throat and stuck therein. I wanted to weep out of sorrow, but felt timid before the strangers. No Oliver could have loved his Rosalind more. As each minute passed, Basu was moving in my mind like a motion picture reel by reel.

I arrived at my old hotel and was immediately put in Room No. 13. I smiled thinking of Basu's hackneyed joke at my preference for unlucky numbers.

*

I must hereafter tell a tale of unrelieved sadness. I forbear giving all the details, which are gall and wormwood to me. I shall try to be bare and prosaic and the reader must forgive me.

I have had a sorry time since then. My career has gone to pieces. The fates wrought havoc with my life. I am in the world but not of it.

I failed miserably in all my examinations. With my foot on the threshold, I was sacrificed by unknown deities. I cannot blame myself. Nor Room No. 13.

But Basu's arrest was the crowning disaster. It shattered me. I became crazy. Room No. 13 looked sinister and almost made me superstitious. A gang of assassins connected with the MacAdam and Barbone murders was prosecuted. Basu and Kumar were the most prominent among them. They made heroic statements, applauded in many quarters. I had hopes of Basu's innocence. I, who have never believed in prayer, prayed for his sake. The trial was bloody and prolonged. The newspapers fed with vulturish delight on the theme, and ghoulish editors distilled every sensation into gripping headlines. The public took an unholy interest in the whole thing.

All this is history. Basu was sentenced to death, along with the others. He wrote me a letter, full of his usual mockery. I sent him a reply which I cannot as yet publish. I hold it too sacred. It is too intense, too naked. But here is his letter.

"Old Bean! I am off. Life is an adventure, Death may be another. Fill up the blanks, and who is the bloke that says it? Prepare to shed tears. Do you remember Aldington's Death of A Hero? *Here is your hero. Good luck to you, and your best-seller. Call it* The Death of A Pact. *What about my daughter? Bye, bye. Your loving, loving, loving Basu.*

PS. You have my permission to frame my autograph and put this letter in your novel."

*

The rest of my days have been a threnody. I wrote for permission to see Basu. It was not granted.

One day I returned from the beach in a cloud of poetic thought and sauntered lazily into the Young Men's Club.

'It is a tragedy.'

'I think the Judge was right.'

'But transportation would have been enough.'

There was a riot of voices. My eyes swam across the pages they were reading. Basu was hanged. By the neck. Till he was dead. The words were engraven with fire and sword in my heart; and have remained in that little hell.

'Dirty dogs,' I muttered. The infernal eyes turned on me.

'What do you suggest?' squeaked one.

'I suggest that we be all hanged. By the neck. Till we are dead.' They kept silent.

'There is only one way to deal with assassins.'

'But Basu is an exception. You don't know Basu.'

'What about Basu? Read the summing up. He is the poet and the prime mover of the gang. He manufactured the whole literature. He supplied them with slogans and plots!

I was broken-hearted, dizzy, intoxicated. I could not make the defence I knew. 'That is not the real Basu,' I protested.

'As if you know. You do not understand the real principles of criminology.' He was obviously a lawyer.

'I like the chap,' interrupted one, who looked like a student and an amateur in criminology. 'I wonder whether he was a bachelor or married.'

'He lived and died a bachelor,' I spoke, still on my feet. My head was reeling.

'It is all finished,' said an old man.

'But men are not dogs,' I cried heatedly.

'Certainly not,' howled the old man, both of his feet in the grave.

'Then why do you hang him?'

'Because he is a murderer.' The voices swelled: 'I think transportation would have been enough.'

'They deserve it.'

'Do you kill men like dogs?' I cried out.

'It is too abstruse for me,' said the great lawyer.

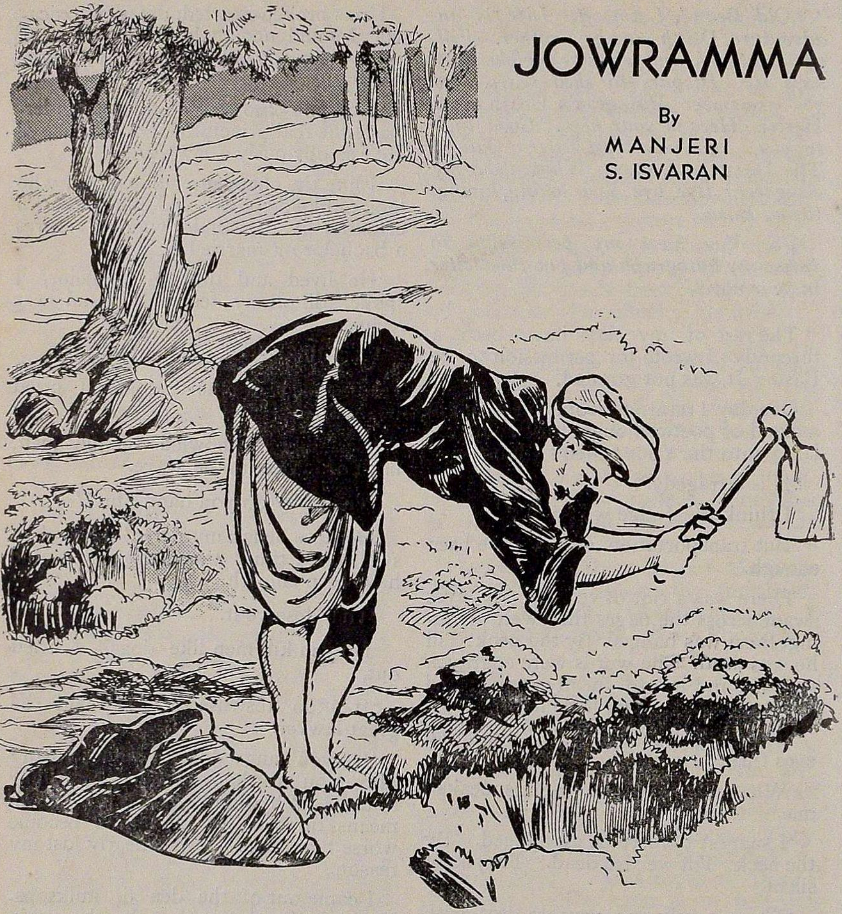
'Do you hang a dog for killing a man? Have you ever hanged a dog for killing a dog? Why don't you do it? By all means do it. But men have become worse than dogs.' I very nearly lost my reason.

I came out of the den of milksops. Hanged. By the neck. By the neck, till he was dead.

I cannot write more of these bitter memories. They haunt my blood. They are painful heart-throbs, small Æschylean tragedies. One of life's powerful candles was smashed before it was lighted and Basu's brilliance was extinguished for ever.

JOWRAMMA

By
MANJERI
S. ISVARAN



'The fog lifting revealed a man digging potatoes.'

THE day had begun clear and bright but before noon the sun fell; shadows raced like steeds, dimpled in rings, and dissolved in hillslope, meadow, and valley; from beyond the greys and quiet greens of silver oaks and eucalyptus a mist thin as muslin rose and moved on gathering speed and thickness. Soon the countryside was in a huge cloudage of fog; heaven and earth had blended in radiant obscurity.

From somewhere a sound came startling the silence; it swelled, it was the electric horn mooing the hour of twelve. The fog which had begun to lift awhile ago cleared away completely when the mooing ceased; church steeples tapered into the sky again; treetops shed their

dews filling the dingles rich ; and meadows lay freshened and humming in their emeraldness.

On a tract of land in Kodapamund where the Kelso Road takes a sharp ascent, the fog lifting, revealed a man digging potatoes. He was thirty-five or thereabouts; had a body sturdy enough to give the earth his warm sweat to drink. He was clad in a coarse kind of cloth which reached up to his knees; a blue woollen coat which had once reposed on a patrician back protected him from the cold; his head was encased in a heavy turban. From early dawn he had been working in his farm. He had manured the cabbage and cauliflower, part of the cultivation, and was now digging the potatoes. When the electric horn mooed he stopped digging, straightened himself, and glanced at the half-filled sack standing near him. His eyes gleamed satisfaction for two days hence was the market day. He placed the shovel aside, spread an empty sack on the ground, and sat on it sighing relief. He then proceeded to flick off the clods of earth that had settled on his body and in the middle of the act turned his head round. The movement was quick and denoted intense awareness; his gaze encountered the picture he had formed in his mind coming to life and emerging from the valley below. It was that of a woman. She was in her early twenties, small-made, prettyish, and carried on her head an earthen pot. Now balancing on a ridge, now leaping over a breach, she walked nimbly and gracefully and was soon by the side of the man. She laid down the pot and while stooping, the end of her saree covering her head slided to her shoulders revealing rich dark hair richer with oil. She adjusted her dress and stood in silence.

The man took the pot in his hands and gently shaking it for a minute began to drink from it. Between mouthfuls he lifted his eyes and looked at the woman who for some reason seemed to avoid his gaze. He put down the pot, wiped the rice of the gruel sticking to his lips by the back of his hand, coughed and spoke in proletarian Canarese; 'Nothing to tell me?'

'I've told all,' the woman replied, and though her tone was gentle there was a note of pettishness in it. She still did not meet his eyes, lapsed into silence again, fingering her necklet of blue beads and looking at her toerings.

'Told all!' the man repeated, 'told your folly. I'm not the one to stand it. He felt that his anger was being wilfully roused.

'I'm not going away from you for ever. I've not left you these seven years, since I became your wife. Why not listen to reason?' Her voice was pleading and sure that it would mollify him she cast her timid eyes on him. But she only met a face in which anger was rising rapidly.

'You can leave me for ever,' he said in quick acerbity. 'Those people have put madness into your head. And you are asking me to listen to reason!'

'Yes, for the last three years, but you have not. They *are* nice people, and I *am* going with them.'

'You dare not.' He jumped to his feet and catching hold of her wrist was about to slap her face but something in the limpid splendour of her eyes prevented him from doing so. He fell two steps back and regarded her with awe and faint aversion.

'That decides it then,' she said, panting for breath. 'Nothing can shake my will.'

'Who'll look after the boy?'

For a moment she appeared to be troubled but bracing herself up said: 'I am taking him away with me.'

He was surprised at her calm downrightness; wanted to crack her obstinate head with the shovel but the picture of her as a gentle and obedient wife rose in his mind and he fought down the foul fiend in him. Now she was past all reasoning and she was accusing him for want of reason. Those townspeople had really perverted her, he thought, and his anger against them grew immeasurable. But they were Sirkar people and very rich; he was only a poor fellow with a couple of cows and a little plot that the Sait had permitted him to cultivate in return for looking after his bungalow which lay untenanted for

half of the year when the Secretariat moved back to Madras.

But no; he will not allow anybody to take his wife away from his side for howsoever short a time. Keeping the decision within himself he fell to digging again. His wife watched him for a while, a smile and a frown alternating on her face, but finding that he was not going to be conciliatory, took the pot in which she had brought him his noon-day meal and walking hurriedly, running almost, disappeared into the valley.

(2)

Seven years ago Jowramma had come to Ootacamund as the wife of Mali. She was a native of Mysore and had not visited the land of her birth even once since coming to the hills. The reason was that she had no relative there to pay a visit to; her parents had died within a year of each other after her marriage, and the whereabouts of an only brother who had left home quarrelling with the father were not known. She loved her husband, was intensely devoted to him, helping him cultivate the little plot of land, running a frugal house, and putting by small sums saved out of selling milk and vegetables. The cottage and the farm constituted her world; in sun and shower the lives of the husband and wife had blossomed together into one flower on the hillside, and the parent stem was richer now for the birth of a floweret. It was a boy.

The pair would have continued to be happy through fair weather and foul had not the gentleman with his wife and children arrived in Ootacamund, now three years ago and returned every year after. He was Assistant Secretary, Revenue Department, and came to the hills with the Government of Madras which held its offices here when the year was the hottest in the city.

Jowramma became the servant of the officer's family during its temporary stay in the place. The officer's wife was a good woman, grown good through the yearly routine of child-bearing; she liked Jowramma very much from first she engaged her services. Jowramma was an honest girl, she said to her husband; for tidying the floor and scouring vessels she had no equal; their cook's work was next to nothing: he just boiled the rice and more often overboiled it. Her unruly children were most docile in the maid's hands; Jowramma had a voice as soft as civet to sweeten their sourness; they were never so happy as when she took them to the garden of evenings, wandering by the waterpools thick with lilies and lotuses and by ferny hedges plashed with roses red and white rigadooning in the wind, or climbing to the waggon-shaped huts of the Todas to hear the queer women sing and watch them wheeling in fantastic dance. Why not take Jowramma with them to Madras? She was worth more than a hundred city servantmaids, most of them greedy and unclean. The idea no sooner formed in her mind than she expressed it to her husband who gave instant approval. But Jowramma was not a woman without home and husband to follow them at a mere wish. And when she told Mali what the lady had expressed, he laughed and told her not to be foolish. It's the way of the rich folk,' he said, wrinkling his nose and sniffing.

In the second year of their stay the officer's wife began to tempt the simple hillgirl. The city was all sunshine and colour; here was nothing but fog and cold, fog and cold all the year round. Why not come to spaciousness and freedom? She will pay her amply for her services; her husband may leave the farm and follow her to the city; he too will be given employ; they wanted a gardener. Jowramma heard the words of inducement as in a dream; the picture the lady drew was too dazzling to be true. Her mind was shaken, she stood wavering. But no persuasion, no sweet temptings would shake Mali's heart. To leave the place where he was born and had lived his life! To leave off his farm! Pooh! He would as well jump from the highest peak yonder and die in the valley. The

'*Wandering by the waterpools thick with lilies and lotuses.*'

red earth would be his bed and the mountain mist his shroud. Jowramma went about sullen. A stranger up till now to any domestic rub Mali felt very sad but he hid his sadness in an impassive countenance. 'Curse on the woman who tempts my wife so. Let her take another servant, my wife stays away,' he said with terrible resolution.

But the officer's wife was not so easily to be browbeaten. Would not Jowramma come with her on a short visit to the city? She shall return before her husband feels her absence. But once she managed this, the lady was sure that she could retain the maid.

Mali was furious. The mischief once set afoot had grown apace; a gentle and obedient wife had turned into an insurgent. Being by nature a kind man he could not steel his heart against his wife and deal with her harshly; he had infinite faith in her good nature asserting again. But he was deceived.

(3)

The Assistant Secretary's wife was happy beyond words. Trunks, suitcases, baskets, and beddings had already been sent to the station. She, her husband, and children were dressed brightly for the journey. There was only an hour more to start; they were waiting for Jowramma.

Soon she joined them with her little boy. A small bundle was her only luggage. They told her how happy they were all to have her with them; it was wise of her husband not to have raised the big stick to cudgel her decision. She had been a marvel.

Jowramma smiled gratefulness for their kind words; for very joyousness she could not speak. But was it joy?

The little covey set out to the railway station. Every yard that took her away from her home saddened Jowramma; the night previous she had violently quarrelled with her husband; his angry voice still rang in her ears. She bent over her boy sitting on her lap and kissed his eyes which were opened wide in wonder at the ride; the chatter of the other children had no meaning for her. She was withdrawn into herself.

The station was reached, tickets were purchased. Jowramma with her boy on her hip stood in the little platform; very soon the train would carry her away to the plains where she had never been before. She felt strange in the company; felt that the world of people in which she found herself was not hers. It began to drizzle and fog. Half-an-hour more, and the train would steam away. A tremor was in her heart, a giddiness in her head, a hectic gleam in her eyes. She seemed to see her husband toiling lonely in the farm, in the cold wind and dense fog and pelting rain, cooking his food, tending the cows, lonely, desolate. And through the mist she saw his sad face looming large and unnatural, his eyes reproaching her for her disobedience and desertion. She stifled a sob in her throat, clasped her boy tight to her bosom, and picking up the bundle made for the exit. And she called out in a faint voice to those that were looking amazed at her behaviour: 'I am not coming.'

The guard blew the whistle.

The Assistant Secretary's wife was in a rage but found that there were bugs in the cushions of the first class compartment.

On the road to Kodapamund walked a woman with a child on her hip and a bundle in her hand. She walked rapidly, seemed to skim like a bird, seemed to have the heart of one.

(4)

The mist had cleared away and the sun like a Koh-i-noor poured its chill brilliance over hill and dale and meadow. The wind was hoydenish, caressing the boles, twirling the leaves, wimpling the waters, fluting, whistling, and laughing gossamer laughter at flowers that gleamed like flakes of icy fire.

In the little farm the man went on digging potatoes. He did not seem to be alert and buoyant as he was yesterday; there was a languidness in his limbs and the hands that dug were weary and automatic. A half-filled sack stood by his side; now and then his eyes lighted on it listlessly.

'Why didn't you go?' he asked. 'You know I would not,' said she in a whisper, nestling closer to him.

The electric horn mooed the hour of twelve. The thinning murmuration of the sound seemed to produce a nostalgic effect upon him; he rose from his bending posture, threw the shovel aside and sat on the half-filled sack. He sighed, and by sheer force of habit turned round.

His eyeballs wellnigh bounced out in astonishment and surprise. He saw his wife approaching him swiftly.

He rose up; the shrunken features of his weather beaten face filled out with light and tenderness; he clasped her impetuously to his breast and his voice in her ear rounded to the murmur of the wind.

'Why didn't you go?' he asked.

'You know I would not,' said she in a whisper, nestling closer to him.

He made no answer. Chucking up her chin he kissed her full on the mouth.

In his tight clasp she felt the strength of the hills and trees around; in the dew of her lips and eyes he tasted the sweet of life and the salt of the earth.

Two Fantastic Fables.

SOME working men employed in a shoe factory went on a strike, saying: 'why should we continue to work to feed and clothe our employer when we have none too much to eat and wear ourselves?'

The manufacturer, seeing that he could get no labour for a long time and finding the times pretty hard anyhow, burned down his shoe factory for the insurance and when the strikers wanted to resume work there was no work to resume. So they boycotted a tanner.

*

THE members of a legislature being told that they were the meanest thieves in the world, resolved to kill themselves. So they bought shrouds and, laying them in a convenient place, prepared to cut their throats. While they were grinding their razors some tramps passing that way stole the shrouds.

'Let us live, my friends,' said one of the legislators; 'the world is better than we thought. It contains meaner thieves than we.'

AMBROSE BIERCE

From Wisdom's Scrip.

BOTH are wretched, those in love and those who have no love; the one with it and the other without it.

Few indeed will like the poetry of a local poet, and the beauty of their own wives.

Death laughs at him who is carefully protecting his body; earth laughs at the hoarder; the wayward wife laughs at her husband fondling his son!

A flower, a fruit, a charming girl, a coin fallen——if seeing these on the way one does not pause, he is surely a dunce.

LOVE AND THE LEOPARD

By MANNAR KADAMBY

'LADIES and gentlemen,' shouted the pompous manager of The Great Circus for the third time and still failed to attract any attention. Miss Tara Bai had just then made her exit through a mist of soft silk and the audience was in a noisy comment about her performance. The manager perspired and in the blazing circle of lights his face shone as if besmeared with oil. His hand shook visibly and the jewelled fingers which were half buried in a multicoloured handkerchief sent flashes of glittering light as he mopped his face. In a way of emphasis he raised him arm and shouted again, gathering all his strength till the veins in his thick neck swelled and stood out. He paused, exhausted with his own effort. At last the audience took pity on him and the noise abated. The manager afraid to keep silent any longer resumed quickly, 'Ladies and gentlemen, you will be pleased to know that now comes the greatest event of the night. Our world-famous animal trainer will allow his hand to be eaten by a leopard.' The last words were drowned in a loud applause accompanied with shrill whistles from the gallery. There was great excitement at the announcement of the much advertised and long awaited thrill.

Inside the cordon of tall spikes stood Bhima Rao, the animal trainer, who appeared fiercer than any beast if only one cared to look into his eyes longer than a minute. The long whip in his hand cracked sharply and he ordered the door of the cage to be opened. Two men on the top of the big cage tugged at the heavy door. The leopard was named Quicksilver as a tribute to his activity by the manager. But this night Quicksilver was not particularly active and he sauntered as caged animals do, even slower. Presently he stopped to watch the widening slit with languorous eyes. The trained eye of Bhima Rao noticed something strange in Quicksilver's behaviour and he knew that his calmness meant danger. But the show was extravagantly advertised and it must continue. 'Quicksilver,' Bhima Rao commanded and cracked the whip. The little treacherous animal of the jungle obeyed like a big domesticated cat without even so much as a snarl of protest. He mounted the seat as he had done on many other nights, even more readily. There was no noise in the entire tent save for the continuous hiss of the gas lights like a gap in a radio. The animal trainer advanced with measured steps towards Quicksilver and thrust his bare arm between the jaws of death. The whole audience gasped with one breath and gazed with devouring eyes at the daring spectacle. The monotonous hiss was rudely broken by squeaks of pulleys and a figure descended from the heavens. It was Tara Bai dressed perfectly as an angel—even the two wings were not wanting, and beside her stood a big basket from which she showered white flowers on the wonderful tableau of the conqueror and the conquered. From the ceiling came a powerful effulgence and flooded the figures with a blue lustre. The whole vision was like a page taken out from a fairy tale. The colour changed in succession, blue and green and violet and red. The angel kept on showering the flowers in recognition of the man's superiority over the beast. The white blossoms changed colour as often as the beam changed. It looked as though the flowers themselves were bestowed with some ethereal beauty as they gently dropped on him with a caressing touch that was almost human. The audience gazed and gazed in mute expression of their delectation at the thrilling tableau set in a fine display of colours. As the beam projected a red circle and suffused the flowers bloodred, there came a loud yell from the cordon and Bhima Rao shouted at the top of his voice for the lights to be

subdued. But he was not heeded to. The leopard snorted and sprang at the beam of light. He fell against the tall spikes with a rattle but recovered cleverly and landed on the floor. The audience which was keyed up to excitement took time to take in the situation. But when the swarthy shape of Quicksilver in the red light jumped at his master, the whole tent went panicky. In that unmanageable tumult and shouting nobody heard the fierce shrieks of the pulleys or the fiercer shrieks of the angel who was drawn up instantly. As the crowd was wedging in the doorway there was a fiendish fight for life inside the tall spikes between the man and the beast. The animal was on him now, its deadly paw was mauling his face. Bhima Rao gripped the leopard by the neck and held him as far from him as possible. Once or twice his arms weakened and the elbows bent, but he fought with superhuman strength and thrust back the hot nauseating breath. He could not hold very much longer, the hands showed signs of exhaustion and trembled. He kept on frantically shouting for the light to be extinguished but it was helplessly mixed up in the fierce roars of the leopard and the tumult of the crowd. At last his left elbow gave in and a heavy blow pounded on his shoulders. He fell. Immediately, the sharp claws of Quicksilver pinned him down and his powerful teeth fastened on his neck. With a triumphant toss, he began to drag the victim towards the cage. Just at this time came loud reports of pistol shot—four or five in quick succession. A heavy groan, and the animal was dead.

Tara Bai climbed over the spikes and got inside the cordon with all the agility of an acrobat, and aimed a shot at the red glass. The glass splintered to pieces and the light revealed the prostrate figure of the animal trainer and beside him the gruesome heap of the leopard in a pool of blood. Bhima Rao's face was drenched with blood. Tara Bai nearly fainted at the ghastly sight of raw flesh. 'Oh, is there no one to to help him?' she cried and wrung her hands and cast a look of despair all round. There was no one in the entire tent, the place was deserted. She realised that she was the only person who could help him. When she was yet undecided as to what she should do Bhima Rao called to her in a faint voice: 'Tara, poor Quicksilver drugged and—I had told—that he hated red. No, do not worry—I am done—only a few more minutes. We quarrelled some days ago and he swore that I shall not remain in his way—for long. I did not tell you—save you the pain.' He continued with difficulty, 'forgive me—crossed your path—he has beaten, treated you brutally after I came—I the cause of all—your suffering. Tara, say you have—tell me—' He essayed once again but could not finish what he wanted to tell. Tara controlled a choking sob and pressed her lips to his forehead. His lips parted in a smile. A little clot of blood in the corner of his mouth cracked and oozed to an ever increasing liquid ruby. She could no longer stand it and gave herself up to sobs.

Next morning, the circus tent was full with the familiar khaki shirts. The manager after giving his short report, sat stirring a glass of ice and water in his tent. Tara Bai was reading the detailed report of the death of Bhima Rao and smiled in derision as she finished it. 'Well,' she said with a shrug of her shoulders, 'it might be an accident or a tragedy to the newspaper but I know the truth. You schemed it it all—schemed and murdered.'

The manager chuckled and took the glass tumbler in which the ice tinkled invitingly. 'You know that I am sorry to lose the best man in the company. But Quicksilver was very unruly last night. You did right in killing him.'

'I do not wish to discuss about it with you,' she said in a voice of finality. 'I am leaving this very instant. From the very day that Bhima Rao came, you quarrelled with him on account of me. You know that Quicksilver hated red and you drugged the animal to be doubly certain. Do you still deny that

you schemed and murdered him to get me? Now that he is dead, I do not wish to take any trouble to expose you, unless you molest me. I shall never see you again. Yes, I am almost glad it happened. I am no longer in your power—I am free now.'

The manager stood up and said loudly, 'Look here Tara, stop a little. What about your contract? I can make you stop.'

She turned round at the triangular opening of the tent and laughed. 'You mashter—you to make me stop! Don't bluff. And don't try your brute force. I shall scream, the police have not left the tent yet. As for the contract,' her eyes twinkled with sarcasm and mischief, 'well, one word from me and you will hang. So, good-bye to you, great mashter, and good-bye to your Great Circus as the Europeans say.' She moved out into the burning sun.

The manager sank back in his chair. He contemplated dully the thick mist that had coated the tumbler. Large drops of perspiration collected on his temples. The two important artistes who supported the Circus were gone—one was dead, the other had left. He sat sipping the cold water and gazed at the departing figure of the acrobat till it disappeared at the far end of the quivering heat.

A Folk—Song

YOU are mine, and I am yours,
That is the surest of all the sures.
Fast are you locked in my heart alway,
And the key of my heart is thrown away,—
For ever within it must you stay.

THE CASKET OF DOOM

By M. GOPAL RAO

ONE evening as Periah was sweeping the floor, his dying master called him to his bedside.

'Periah,' he told him, 'my end is nearing. Kittu is a child. You should take care of him after my death.'

'I will do anything for you, my master,' said Periah wiping away a tear on his right cheek. 'My master, I would lay down my life for him. You know that,' and he pressed his hands in a fervour of emotion.

Old Subbiah peered anxiously into his eyes. The servant was agitated and trembling, strangely changed from the Periah of yesterday. He knew not what to speak. He was frankly confused. But on an overpowering impulse, scarce knowing what he said, he took his hands and kept them in his for a long time.

'Pera, my son might call you foolish names. Act as a parent towards him and render him the best help you can. For this, I give you a silver casket which is now kept in my son's box. Keep it as a memento and don't destroy it.'

Periah, forced some degree of calmness on himself, and looked at the reclining figure dumbly, questioningly. In the dim light, his eyes promised many things.

'You can now go,' said the Archaka.

He lingered for a while, then through the darkness of the night glided back to his hut.

*

At three next morning, the Archaka died.

To Periah, the death of his master was a severe shock. He remembered what his master had confided to him that night; it came floating up through his memory during the still hours of the might following the death.

It had taken him so completely by surprise that even yet he had scarcely realised what this was that had happened to him. He had heard of death and seen it, but hitherto he and it had been entire strangers, but now all the horrible fear that surrounds death quaked his whole being.

A week passed. He went to his young master and told him what his father had wished. Kittu laughed at the proposal; he tried to be rough but as he had never been rude, never failed in that rustic courtesy which springs from the heart of the crudest villager, he could not think of hurting his feelings. Periah tended to be talkative, but Kittu, not being desirous of continuing the tiresome conversation bade him good-night and retired.

Periah was not much humoured by this action of his new master. The sadness which wrapped him as in a veil never left him, and he felt vaguely that his young master had not quite appreciated this new development in his affairs. At that, the sense of fear was aroused in him. He scorned it; tried to convince himself it did not exist, but it did, torturing him with its strangeness and with the thoughts that it engendered. He had expected nothing like this, when his old master had called him to his bedside. As he thought of the horror that was opening up before him, he could not prevent his thoughts from travelling back towards that memorable evening; that occasion when old Subbiah had beseeched him to regard Kittu as his own child; but often in the course of his work he would see the master's inquiring face appear before him and hear his voice as he had heard it when he was alive.

There was only one way of escape from these thoughts, this flitting back of the heart which brought him so keen an anguish—and that was in work.

*

'Pera,' said Kittu one evening, 'circumstances force me to dispense with

your services. I don't stand in need of a guardian. You are old and—'

'But master,—'

'Listen, man,' Kittu continued, 'all the lands that belonged to us have been mortgaged. I am poor, as poor as you are.

Periah hesitated, half-believing, half dubious.

And at that moment, a little waft of evening air caugut the branch of the jasmine and as he stood there, brushed it softly against his profile, like a perfumed benediction. He stood there spell-bound, looking at him in the dim light.

'As you wish, master,' he meekly replied and bent his eyes towards the ground.

Kittu made no answer. He folded his arms over his chest, and was silent.

Periah's heart began to thud, painfully and heavily. His suspicions were aroused. But he did not know how he could account for all this strange behaviour.

'You could give me the casket at least,' he begged.

'Oh—that you mean. Why, man, that too has gone. Gone with the rest.' There was a brief silence. 'That's all,' he said, 'there is nothing left for you,' and without even casting a glance at the poor old man, returned to his house.

Slowly Periah walked home. What course was he to adopt now? The master had ruined him. Where was he to go now? Again he was asking himself the question which he had so often uttered in his heart's deep despondency. Almost unconsciously he felt that there was no place for him to go to. His desire now was to get away, anywhere, but yet he paused, for a strange thrill ran through him as he thought of what old Subbiah would think if even he did, when he came to know that Periah had left the house. Then he thought of Kittu. He had grown to love him, to cling to him. Surely there would be no harm in his taking one last look at him. Even that rude young man would not begrudge him that request. Obeying an impulse which was irresistible, he went out into the night, through the margosa avenue and to the tiled house which cut it off at the other end. Kittu was fast asleep, face turned upwards, with one arm resting on the cot and the other thrown on the pillow on his left. He looked at him, his heart full. He stood there, tears falling fast, how long he could not say, and then returned to his cottage.

Some days passed.

Kittu did not care to find out whether Periah had gone but he felt ever since he had left the house, that something was always missing in his house. One night, he took his meal early, turned down the wick of the lamp and sat on his bed. Then he yawned and suddenly realised that he was desperately unhappy. He lay down but could not sleep. Only he shut his eyes and resigned himself to deep meditation.

It must have been an hour later, when he suddenly awoke and stared around. The room was flooded with moonlight; there was nothing to be seen; yet he had the positive feeling that there was some other presence in the room beside his own. He had had a half-conscious vision in the moment of waking of a shadowy something that had seemed to fade away by the door. He sprang out of the bed and ran to the door. It was open. He peeped out into the darkness but could see nothing. He closed the door, and puzzled, went back to his bed. But when he drew the blanket over him, he felt something stout moving slowly over him. He jumped up, flung aside the blanket, and stared at the cot. Stretched at full length was a black snake, its head resting on the pillow and its tail curled round the cylindrical stand that stood at one end of the cot.

Kittu was fightened. Rushing out into the street, he cried out, 'Snake! Snake!' A few neighbours rushed in with sticks but when they entered the bedroom, the snake was no longer there. They searched every nook and corner but

could not find it. Kittu waited for a moment or two, after they had gone, then shrugged his shoulders, turned out the light, and then climbed into his bed. His nerves were admirable and in five minutes, he was asleep.

Next morning as he was taking a constitutional, he came face to face with Periah. The servant looked pale, and agitated, and Kittu could not help at once being struck by the peculiarity of his manner.

'Periah—!'

'Master—!'

'How do you do—?'

'Oh, sir, not quite well.' His voice was low and sweet. Kittu's heart thrilled. It seemed to well up in his throat.

'I have a casket here, Pera, which really belongs to you. I thought of keeping it with me, but have since changed my mind. You shall take it now.'

'But what can I do with it?'

Without answering, Kittu made straight for the house. He opened the box in the bedroom and as he took the casket out, something hissed. Being in a hurry, he, however, ignored it. Presently he shut the box and even as he locked it, he felt a prick in his finger. He looked at it and saw a tiny speck thereon.

'It's yours,' he said and gave it to the servant. The old man took it, and looked at it, then at Kittu. Kittu staggered back pale as death and a sound like a moan of bitter anguish escaped his lips.

'Forgive me, Pera. I did you a wrong.' He knelt before him. The poor old man was puzzled. How changed was Kittu! Forgive him? What was there in him to forgive?

'Kindly get up, master,' he remarked and then attempted to raise him. But the penitent sinner knelt still. Periah stook him gently. There was no warmth in him. Falling on one knee, he felt the young man's pulse. It had stopped.

For some time he stood there, then left him. He traversed the short distance between the boy and the house, stopping to look behind and then passing near the door to look at the dead body. He was about to pass through the door but stayed for a moment, for his conscience would not permit him to go. A great restlessness had taken possession of him. He had been aware of it growing within him for some time, becoming stronger every moment. Now the death of his young master put the crowning touch to a state of mind that was utterly chaotic. His keen eyes looked towards the corpse.

The casket was there!

The corpse was there!

But between the two and touching both, lay something that glittered in the sun.

It was a snake.

THE CHANGE

By S. RAJAGOPALAN

THE little street running to the west of the Jubilee Park was gay and noisy on the 24th January 1920. Srikanth had just then returned from England as an M.A. (Oxon). Visvanatha Aiyar, his father, had invited the elite of the town to an At Home. There was a cordial response to the invitation; the members of the European Club, two gentlemen on the staff of the Y.M.C.A., besides, of course, several Indian worthies were present on the occasion. The Unani physician, Rahiman Begh, with his gorgeous turban and the middle-aged Samuel Jones, wantonly in slippers, stalked in the hall to the amusement of Srikanth and his Oxford chum, Robert Grafton (now, by an irony of fate, one of the managers of a thriving confectionery in the Vallampadi Union).

Half-clad urchins crowded before the Aiyar's house, drawn there by the sight of three pairs of Ford Old Model and fresh battalions of boys were gathering when the clear, sonorous voice of Madame Galli Curci reached the two ends of the street.

When that perfect piece of music, the Blue Danube, flowed in the ancient hall of the house, the Oxonians felt a sudden thrill of reminiscence, pensively smiled at each other, and all unexpectedly began to dance; orthodox, old brahmins burst out into loud guffaws but could see presently that there was something artistic about the apparently odd movements of the two youths, for one or two stray members of the E.C. had already left their seats and were dancing a new kind of solo.

Old Seshanna, a clerk in the Survey, had his own peculiar notion of humour; he stood up, smiled, and shouted with many a heavy latinism that a dance should be conducted on exclusively occidental lines, which, of course, was impossible at the time.

Srikanth's nephew, Venku, never in his life spared the old clerk and now he dared to suggest to the "brand new" Oxonian that he might dance with the slim, shy, old-world-minded Rajam, Seshanna's daughter!

'How old is she?' asked Srikanth.

'Old enough,' replied Venku.

'That is?'

'She is seventeen or thereabouts.'

'Married?'

'Certainly not,' said Venku, 'do you think Sesha is the kind of man to hurry his daughter into an absurd marriage? He is, I suppose, angling for an Oxon or a Civilian or, at the worst, a Tripass.'

'Really?'

'Believe me or not!'

'I don't. There must be something wrong with our old Anna. What is it?'

'Can't you see the simple thing? Our clerk is hard up for money.'

'Come along, Venku. Is Anna's case so hopeless?' said Srikanth as he slowly moved to a solitary quarter of the hall along with his nephew.

'Their chauffeur told me Susila would be coming in a minute,' said Venku. Srikanth laughed outright. Now, tell me about this Rajam. Isn't she a rather sickly, little girl with fine eyes, an intelligent look, and exquisite lips?'

'A small girl with a small mouth!' said Venku. 'Your idol hasn't grown up very markedly since you left Bombay. Perhaps she has good looks but her figure is woeful. Ha! Ha! What a funny creature! Shall I show you some caricatures?'

'A mighty level-headed chap you are!' remarked Srikanth. 'That is good. I think you will become a statesman one day. Read Southey's biographies carefully. When I was about

your years, Venku, I had all sorts of complexes. But then I wish those days back. I was a playmate of this Rajam...' In a quarter of an hour the Oxonian had opened his bosom to his dazed junior. Srikanth said that Rajam's young face used to appear like the "first morn when in a mother's eager gaze an infant learns to toddle on the tidy, Indian streets," that the softness of Rajam's features used to remind him of "the tender petals of a lotus pressed into dying fragrance under the soft feet of a fairy queen of ancient times," and so on. The semi-poetic young man confessed that he had even addressed poems to Rajam and that on a moonlit night, in a grove of margosa, he had said to her that he would cross the waters to the lands of plenty to come home a rich man and wed her.

'You have forgotten my caricatures,' reminded Venku who couldn't stand poetry.

He moved towards a table ; he beamed up suddenly, rushed to Srikanth, pressed his hand, and whispered, 'There! See for yourself the living subject of my caricatures.'

Rajam and her mother were moving slowly at one end of the hall. Venku was in some respects more faithful to facts than his uncle informing an idea about Rajam. She was slim to the point of leanness and was rather undersized. She was slightly fair of complexion—but she was not brown. Her features were small and symmetrical. In Srikanth's eyes everything about her contributed to a sense of holiness. He thought that even her lips were beautiful and something fervently to be be touched and fondled. He had seen her in temples, seen her face glow inward while the sacred flame of the camphor spread dim, scattered halos around the unseen divinity ; he had watched the red beauty mark on the perfect crescent of her forehead with all the ardour of a crystal gazer, searching for suggestions of abiding beauty in the minute undulations of light and shade, in their chequered dance on the ruby ground of that beauty-mark. In the pale sheen of the pendent lamps and amidst the vibrant chant of Vedic hymns there came a revelation to Srikanth : Rajam and the golden idol of the goddess were the twins of a single, enthralling conception of beauty. And the scant figure of the mortal seemed divinely appropriate in his eyes though for other mortals, he would modify his laws of beauty.

Rajam paused suddenly and looked for Srikanth. Her mother who had pointed him to her felt keenly perturbed at the awkward slowness of the girl to follow up her hint. With hidden anger the matron hurried on and the maiden stood all alone before a dozen white, inexplicable faces, bright in her thick, blue sari. There was a confusion on her face which left a nebulous track of charm ; and in its midst her large eyes shone like bright stars on the fringe of a winter cloud.

Venku laughed at her and even beckoned to her to leave the hall. Grafton gazed at her lingeringly.

Rajam caught sight of Srikanth. The small, handsome, half-clad boy with whom she once used to play in the streets and chase the soft, brown sands as they arose, and roamed in the moonlight like silent saints in orange-robes, that same boy was now a young man in a strange, foreign dress, turned, as she thought, into an object of horror. To her he seemed to be in a disguise which shocked her. And she recalled the shock when the boy Srikanth used to spring before her from a hidden nook with the hide of a tiger all over him. When Srikanth saw her she felt that there was something irreparably wrong with him and hastened away from the hall like an offended angel.

'Were they in fancy dress, Kant?' asked Grafton with surprise. 'What funny people all your ladies should have been once, to judge from those walking fossils! No doubt there are superbly elegant ladies like your Susie...Now, what about her? She hasn't yet turned up?' Grafton paused a little and then whispered to his friend, 'Sometimes, Kant, I feel I should marry one of your reformed girls.'

Srikanth smiled and said, 'Thou fitful, old romancer!'

'Here is Miss Susila!' said Grafton.

Susila B.A., was tall and robust and two-and-twenty. Her rich complexion on which had travelled all these years the costliest soaps of Paris peeped like a June dawn here and there. She wore a plain sari with rich borders. A solitary bangle encircled her right arm and stealthily approached its radiant, round-faced neighbour who was rhythmically murmuring the mysteries of taste and fashion.

Her father, Dewan Bahadur Rama Aiyar, introduced her to some gentlemen. When that ceremony was over she walked towards Srikanth. He stood up and took her to her seat.

The At Home was in full swing. When Susila, Srikanth, Grafton, and Venku sat round a table, Susila said: 'I have made a capital snapshot. Just when I was entering, I saw two queer women. Who are they, Srikanth?'

'I don't know,' said Srikanth.

Venku said, 'Oh, the old woman is a clerk's wife. The young one is a clerk's daughter. . . a poor, starving Vaishnava girl who does not yet know the earth is round.'

Grafton remarked, 'You have what I call the "camera-sense", Susila. You have done a splendid thing by photographing the girl. Will you give me a copy of it? I want to convince my friends in England; they won't believe me when I talk about your country girls. Your photo, I mean your photo of the girl, will serve me admirably.'

'Look here, Grafton,' said Srikanth, 'why do you want to spread prejudice in England?'

'But that should be done,' said Susila. 'Unless that is done there is no hope of improving the fossils.'

Susila took out the spool. 'I shall take three prints. You may have one, Mr Grafton. One copy of the photo will come out in a Ladies' Magazine. There is one more. What shall I do with it?'

'Give that to me,' said Srikanth.

'I shall. . . . Why do you want it?'

'All right. Keep it with you. I shall get it from you some other day.'

'Some other day when you will begin social propaganda?'

'I am afraid not.'

'What is our programme for the day?' began Venku.

'Well, you suggest,' said Srikanth.

'For God's sake don't bore me with your opera, waltz, foxtrot, horsetrot, symphonies and other "funnies,"' said Venku.

'Winkie is right,' said Grafton, 'We should go out this evening.'

'To the cinema,' said Venku.

'Mischievous boy! You mean that dirty, gipsy tent?' asked Grafton in wonder.

'It is a touring cinema. The programme tonight is "The Delicate Savage of Ostend".'

Just at the time when Susila, her father, Grafton, and Venku started for the cinema, Srikanth could not be found in the house. Venku rushed towards Susila with a piece of paper on which Srikanth had written: 'Venku, please tell our friends I would join them in the cinema in about half an hour.'

The Aiyar's Sunbeam merrily glided along the street towards the cinema tent.

*

Srikanth wore a plain dhoti and an angavastram. He stepped into what appeared to be a small hall from which he could see the kitchen. Rajam was sitting on the bare floor surrounded by a golden eventide of freshly burnished utensils.

The damp walls of the house resembled old, perspiring giants. The moist red floor was decorated with patterns of white powder spread here and there.

Pattamma closed the kitchen-door. That act gave a stab to Srikanth's feelings. He presently recovered from it and said, 'I came here to see you all.

How do you do ? How is my old friend, Rajam ? Was it she in the kitchen ? Oh, when is her marriage ?'

The question of all questions in Pattamma's eyes ! But she had a ready answer. Unhesitatingly she said, 'The coming July.'

'Who is the bridegroom ?' Srikanth persisted.

Pattamma mentioned the priest of a local temple.

'Sheer nonsense !' remarked Srikanth. 'Why are you all so very unimaginative ? Suppose I wish to marry Rajam. . .'

Pattamma laughed heartily. 'That is a very good joke,' she remarked. She felt however highly flattered.

'Why did you close that door ? Should'nt I have a look at Rajam ?' The question gave a stab to Pattamma's feelings. She almost ran towards the door and opened it. Rajam appeared in full view, bright and sudden, as a peacock feather dropping from a dusty book.

'Why do you stand there like a statue ? Have you not a word to say to your old playmate ?'

Srikanth knew he had overridden the rules of Brahmin society with superhuman recklessness in a minute and a half. He walked towards Rajam and said, 'Why are you so very shy ? Pattamma, won't you encourage her to speak with me ?'

The matron said, 'He wishes to marry you, Rajam. What say you to it ?'

'Mother,' said Srikanth, 'I shall ask her that myself. See, she is yet silent. She won't reply to me in your presence, Pattamma.'

Srikanth wondered inwardly at his audacity and rudeness. The old woman took his hint and stole out of the room and stood facing the street and fearfully expecting that Seshanna might appear at any moment.

'What is this cruel joke you play on us, poor and helpless people ?' asked Rajam. 'This afternoon I saw a queer woman as I left your house. She teased us very much like you. She took out a small, black box as we approached her. Then she went away laughing. Are you not going to marry that woman ?'

'What about you ? Are you for the stupid priest ?'

'Oh, he is only a figment. Nobody cares to marry me, it seems.'

Srikanth smiled as he thought of the extreme naivete of the girl before him.

'Did you never love any man in your life, Rajam ?'

'I loved a young man but it was a fruitless love. That young man changed and changed until he was a foreigner in my eyes.'

Pattamma entered the room and said that Seshanna was returning home.

'Seshanna !' said Srikanth as the old gentlemen stepped into the house. 'Two years since we met under this roof.'

*

'Who was the delicate savage of Ostend ?' asked Srikanth.

'You must have seen her yourself,' said Susilla, 'I can't give you the whole story. We came away in the middle of it. A sudden gust upset one part of the cinema tent.'

'Oh ! was that so ? When did you come home ?'

'Even as early as half past seven. I have something interesting for you. I have made the prints myself. The girl looks awfully ridiculous.'

'Is that so ? Let me see it.' Srikanth took the photographs from Susila and surveyed them wistfully.

'Don't they make you laugh ?'

'Far from it. I find nothing ridiculous about this girl. . . . You will understand me, Susila, in a minute. I think love has a racial basis.'

'No doubt. But what is the point ?'

'Grafton, for instance, can't love you. He should become an Indian or else

you must be an English woman rather than an anglicized Indian.'

'My goodness! What is the point?'

'I said a minute. There is half a minute more. A true Indian may love the very woman at whom you are laughing now.'

Susila felt that the same man who had been writing her sentimental letters from England had snubbed her most unchivalrously. The bold, elegant, lady graduate felt at that moment very much like a child on the brink of tears. She pensively left Srikanth.

Visvanatha Aiyar now came upstairs and said to his son, 'Now is the moment for your decision, Srikanth. When will you have your marriage? Mr Aiyar is in a hurry to settle that point. Look here, I have drafted the invitation strictly to your taste. Look into it yourself and fix a date.'

Srikanth got the draft of the invitation from his father and made a few alterations therein.

'Still further alterations? Let me see what they are . . . . . Srikanth, are you really serious? Who is Rajam?'

'A clerk's daughter, a poor Vaishnava girl who does not know even now that the earth is round.'

'Leave off joking. I have made your father-in-law wait downstairs.'

The Dewan Bahadur came up and said, 'What about you? Susila suggests the coming July.'

'I accept her suggestion, sir. Now I should like to have a word with her.'

While the Dewan and Visvanatha Aiyar were descending, the latter said in slow, melancholy tones: 'Ah, my friend! My son has not changed.'

The moon rose up passing the slender fingers of her beams through the dark tresses of the night.

'An ideal night,' Susila said, 'I haven't seen the like of it except in my college days.'

'Oh Susila! it is an unhappy night. I dare not tell you, but still I must, that our love lacks a racial basis.'

'What is this obsession of yours? I don't understand it, Srikanth, though you have said it twice. Well, don't we belong to one and the same race? Certainly, we do.'

'Alas! we don't.'

'Srikanth!'

'We two are scarcely of the same race in anything but the name. You—forgive me, have lost something Indian.'

'I think you are worse than I in the matter of what you evade to describe.'

'I am not. I feel I am my old self. I have not at all changed.'

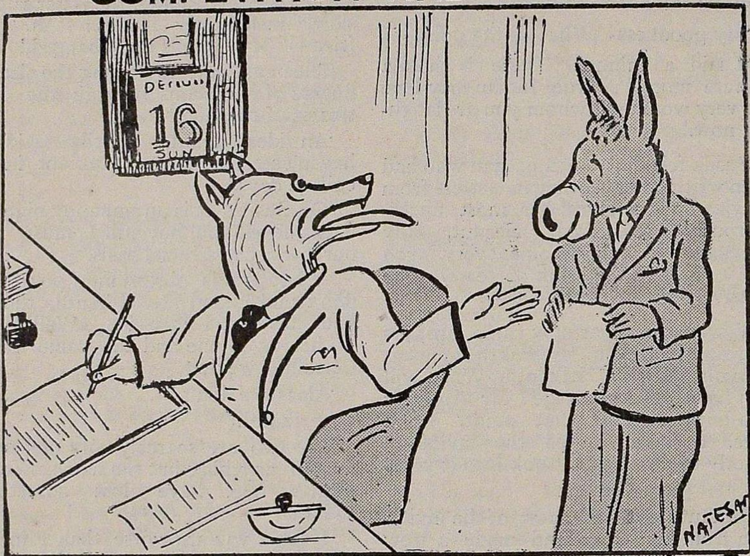
Susila took out a photograph. She smiled faintly as she looked at it. 'Here then is my momento, Srikanth . . . the photo of Rajam.'

*

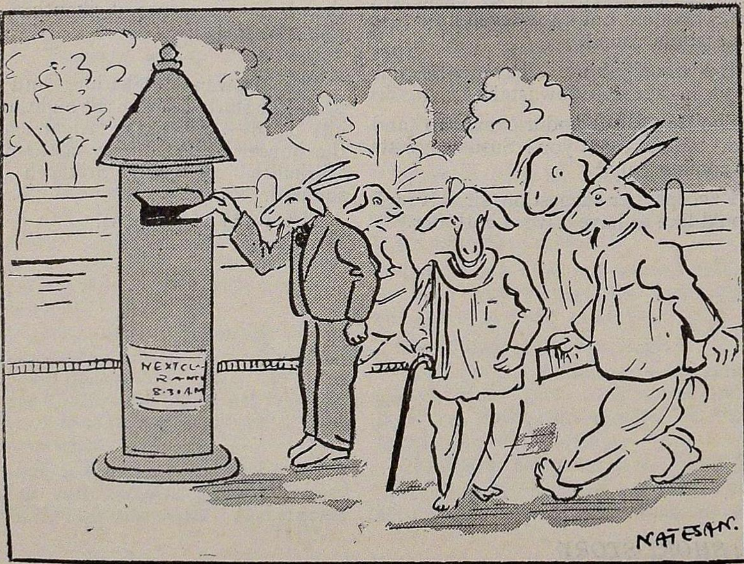
The Dewan Bahadur and his daughter started late in the night for the city of M—.Visvanatha Aiyar entered the house with an angry countenance. 'Srikanth! Srikanth! Srikanth!' he shouted.

There was no response.

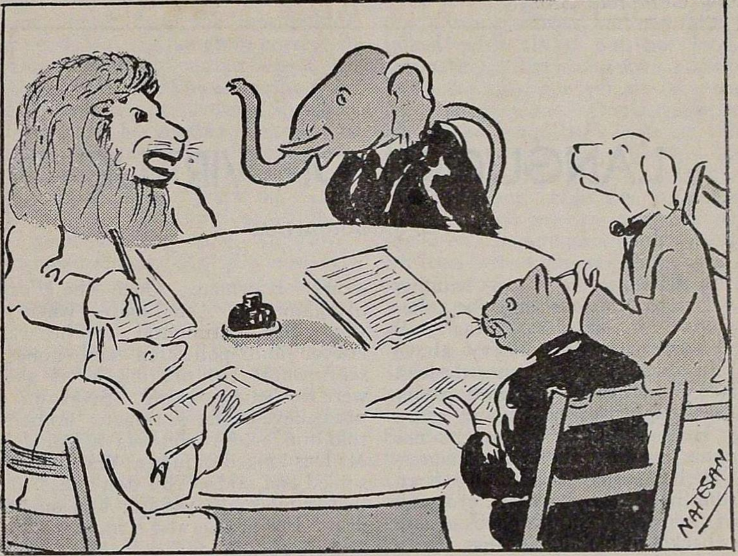
COMPETITION AND AWARD



The Editor (growling like a wolf): 'Hey, Sub, I'm sick, sick of this endless mush. Announce in tomorrow's issue a competition. The best story-writer gets a thousand chips.'
The Sub (taking a mental view from Donkeydom to Donkeydee): 'Hm!'



The lambs and goats are busy.



Leo : It hasn't the scent of blood.
Jumbo : It isn't sweet as sugarcane.
Rin Tin Tin : It isn't clean as a bone.
Graymalkin : It isn't firm as cheese.
Reynard : It isn't plump as a turkey.

Jibber ! Jibber ! Jibber ! Jibber ! The basket is full.

LANGUORS OF VIRTUE

By T. G. JANARDANAM

MISS SIVAKAMI ROW was handing tea to Mr Das and the other visitors. Mr Das was tall and looked solid and heavy above his pillar-like loose trousered legs. His face was large, florid, with plenty of nose, shaggy eyebrows and sharp eyes. He had neither moustache nor beard, his lips were thick and compressed. He had scanty hair on his head and what he had was closely cropped. He sat comfortably in his chair leaning on his back and looking at Miss Row's shapely hands as she was tilting the tea-pot or at her smiling face as she was talking with her mothers' guests.

They were all in a well-sized room tastefully furnished but more or less crowded. There were all sorts of chairs and tables scattered about the room for the comfort of the frequent visitors. The circular flower-disc design on the carpet was in miniature and brighter in colour copied on the tablecloth. There were bright china vases of curious shapes and designs on some of the tables with flowers and leaves sticking out of them. The room was well lighted with electric lights from every position.

The room and the house which held it now belonged to Miss Row. The whole was presented to her, furnished and fitted up amongst other things, by Mr Das. He presented it to her as a proper setting for her beauty and culture; he presented it to her as a thanks offering for her many favours. He was fond of her and called her his Darling in private and his dear Miss Row in public, for she was the daughter of the famous Mrs Kamalakshi Row, the modernest of all modern social reformers. Once he called Sivakami his 'soul-mate' when he was a bit sentimental; for he was a lawyer and politician and none so sentimental as politicians (if people were to believe them). Sivakami did not believe in the soul-mate 'stunt' and told him so, for she was a frank girl. Mr Das looked pained at first and then smiled and said, 'You don't care to be tied to my soul, even if I had one, my dear! For he was also a frank man.'

Mrs Kamalakshi Row once had a husband. She said so and nobody questioned her, for she had a daughter. None had seen her husband and lord, but she said confidently to all her friends that he was a great man and would have led his country—nobody knows where. But he died prematurely, before he could begin to make the world what he wanted it to be. Anyway he died and left his wife and daughter to shift for themselves. His wife took care of herself and her only daughter, and raised herself up in the world. She dabbled in social reform and she was easily amongst the leading lady reformers, as it only needed bravado on platform and uncanny knowledge on sexual matters. She was poor, but not very. She searched for a way out and speculated upon her daughter's marriage. Rich sons-in-law ready to part with money were hard to get and what could be more natural for her (she argued within herself) than to allow Mr Das to support her daughter! The daughter was well educated in the colleges and though of an independent mind she saw nothing objectionable in her mother's arrangements. 'It is all

for your good, dear', the mother said. 'Our good, Ma', the daughter corrected. 'Mr Das is a very influential person. He is rich and can give you everything you need', the mother persuaded. Sivakami kept quiet and her mother hastened to come on the moral point of view. 'You see, he loves you, and it will be no harm if you encourage him just a bit. Love is divine, and God forgives all those who yield for the sake of love.' 'You mean money?' Yet the obstinate daughter corrected. 'What if I do?' the mother retorted. 'Isn't money as good as love? If love is divine, God knows, money also is. Love runs the world, so does money and money can buy the world.' Sivakami was silent. 'We have to sell to buy' she said. 'Every woman has her own price. Even the so-called virtuous ones have theirs.' 'I have mine,' said Sivakami impatiently and Mr Das's way was smoothed.

When Sivakami was at college she had a friend, Leelavati. This girl once at a fair, met a young and handsome man. He was clever and she fell in love with him. He took her out secretly for walks and drives and promised her his love and constancy. After some time he ceased meeting her frequently and at last wrote her a short letter and there ended the romance. Leelavati from the beginning had confided her love-secrets to Sivakami and she brought his last letter to her crying bitterly. The letter was short, to the point, and cruel; He wrote he was sorry to leave her; his nature was to be fickle and flighty and his principle was that variety was the spice of life. Sivakami was indignant and she called him a mean, selfish brute, which set Leelavati crying all the more. But nothing could be done and Leelavati's heart had to become whole again. She was richer in experience.

Sivakami had loved too. But all her loves were platonic. She loved a young boy for three whole years from her thirteenth. She loved the heroes in the stories as perhaps many girls do. But as she grew older her constancy and steadfastness decreased. She had seen many young persons, had met them and talked with them, but not long or intimately. She found some handsome and some ugly, but yet she saw something in every one. One's eyes appealed to her, another's cast, a third's sombre appearance, a fourth's lightheartedness. She found most men attractive but attractive in different ways. So she one day loved or fancied she loved one, and another day another. All these were temporary but she began to philosophize. She generalized her instance to everyone and extended it to all ages. When she heard her friends were in deep love she laughed at them, and began to consider Leelavati a fool and to be as fickle-hearted as her lover, for she too became gayer day by day. She considered all married couples to be hypocritical enough to behave as if one steadfastly loved the other, or conceited enough to believe that one was loved so. She herself loved none in particular and she was sure she could not love anyone as much as all that.

This was the Sivakami who accepted Mr Das. Her feelings towards him were indifferent, or perhaps mixed. She first and foremost thought of him as a fairy godfather who brought her beautiful things. He was also her lover, but what of that? Did he not give her all that she wanted? She felt at times that she could neither respect him nor honour him, nor could she despise him without despising herself. For she was not awed by him, for he treated her almost as a child, petted her, and indulged her in her whims. She without loving him liked him, and without despising, was indifferent to his worth.

Mr Das was a rich man. He was above forty, with a large family. He was a lawyer and a politician and he loved luxuries. Sivakami was one of his luxuries. She was young and beautiful and he liked her type. He made her a sort of a child playmate who brought him back to his youth and joviality. His visits to her house were ostensibly paid to the mother, for he was a respectable man, and she was a respectable woman, and what was more,

they both were public persons. He invited himself to her house whenever he pleased and there gathered round him his friends and other men and women, who were patriots and 'reformers.' They were generally a curious and a contradictory circle. They were a club of queer people of queer trades, as politics and reforms are both queer enough. They came together in Mrs Row's drawing room, talked about great and small things, of science and superstition, of government and anarchy, of religion and philosophy. There were persons who argued for the love of argument, who talked on principles, original or otherwise, and who talked on no principle at all. This talking, Mr Das liked, for it whiled away the time and gave an intellectual cast to his own visits. Mrs Row was proud of the people who collected round her, and though she did not understand much of what they said, she talked with them and seemed to enjoy her conversation and theirs. Sivakami sometimes listened attentively to their talk, which gave ample food for her reflections and whenever it became a bit boring, as it was often likely to, she retired to brown study or small talk, which any society however intelligent or cynical could not refuse to a young and beautiful lady.

Sivakami was now twenty-two years. She was tall, her body well proportioned, her outline clear and flawless, her ample bosom narrowing into the waist, widening below and tapering off towards the legs. She had a face at once charming and intellectual, the lips red and full, the chin smooth and rounded, and eyes bright and intelligent. The eyelids sometimes crescent-like shaded the eyes and she gave out the impression of a girl passing on to womanhood, languid but not lazy, fascinating but not voluptuous. Her mother might have been like her once, only shorter and less intelligent, but she was now shrivelling up, though slowly.

The other occupants of the room were three men and one woman. The foremost (because he was a knight) was Sir Sundram Menon. He was a little man less than five feet, with a thin face, sharp wedgelike nose and shifty eyes. He was a big business man, dealing with banks and other awe-inspiring and infallible concerns. He was rich and clever, and he got his title. His lady was also present, a giant beside her husband, and his guardian angel. The couple had visited England, the other parts of Europe, some bits of America, and samples of the rest of the continents. They were frequent visitors at Sivakami Villa. As soon as Mr Menon became a knight of the Kingdom his wife felt it a bounden duty on herself to take to social reform.

There were also present at this particular occasion Mr Krishnaswami, and Mr Menon, the Knight's nephew and probable heir, for the third or fourth time brought in the present company of intelligent and enlightened men and women. Mr Menon was a young man of about twenty-five, a Bachelor of Arts, and doing nothing in particular Mr Krishnaswami or as he called and signed himself, Mr K. Swami was a middle aged bachelor, a Government nominee in the Council.

They were talking about education. 'This is the time for us to develop, to improve our customs, thoughts,' went on Sir Menon in a low persuasive tone.

'To educate our people and dispel ignorance,' continued Lady Menon taking the cue.

'And that is a good thing. That is what we need most. Education will make us a better and a greater people,' said Mrs Row.

'But don't you think', asked Mr Menon, 'that education makes us cowards also ?'

'Cowards!' exclaimed Mrs Row. Sivakami was interested and looked enquiringly at Mr Menon. He looked round preparing to begin his explanation, got no encouragement from either his aunt or uncle, as perhaps they had already heard him on that subject. But Mr Krishnaswamy seemed interested and Mr Das's eyes twinkled.

'You see it is like this,' he said. 'Education, as it is or as it ought to be, does not harm. But the sort of education we get is not quite the thing for us. Don't be mistaken that I am finding fault with it for it is foreign, irreligious, and all that in the orthodox manner. What I urge is something different. Education, you see, leaving alone the gathering and accumulation of knowledge, is of two kinds: what we learn of ourselves, and what we learn of others. In our case it is what we learn of ourselves as Indians, and of others, Englishmen particularly, and the world at large. Everywhere you find the superiority, material you may call it, of the Englishmen. In business, in governing, in science, in inventions, and in warfare, we find them much ahead of us. We get some knowledge of our past glories, but I doubt if anyone seriously believes in them, for if ours was a real civilization as we would fain have it, it would not have so deteriorated. We learn of our present condition, our inferior powers and achievements, and it is no wonder we become pessimistic. We are all the products of the present education and Mr Krishnaswami is one. See what he is. Remember what he said just now. He finds us weak without a single redeeming feature and says, 'Indians are hopeless'. That is the view of most of our educated Indians (leaving alone the foreigners). What education does to us is this: it makes us compare ourselves with Englishmen, and we are found to be much defective. The Britisher looms before us in frightful magnitude and we realize how insignificant we are. We become spiritless, our enthusiasm runs dry and we are cowards. We learn to lick the shoe that kicks us!'

'To soften it for the next kick, eh,' interrupted Mr Das.

'The ignorant people are not in such a plight as we are. They are more independent, confident and self-respecting. If I were a politician—'

'You will never be one,' blessed Lady Menon.

'Thank you, auntie,' he said. 'If I ever become a politician on the British side I will, for keeping India for a longer period under the present Government, educate people wholesale and ensure the safety of the Government, counting on the effecient character of education to dry up our—our—whatever thing we have worth having.'

'I should think you are right,' remarked Mr Das.

'Oh, no I am sorry to differ,' said reformer Mrs Row. 'Education is a blessing. It makes us—'

'Education makes us cowards? Does it?' said Mr Das ruminatingly. 'Assuredly! It makes us see a lot of things. What we were sure of fades out when we are educated. We see too many sides of a question, a programme, and the result is one becomes a thinking man. That is what a politician, I mean a patriot, ought not to be. His success lies in his enthusiasm, self-confidence, and the number of people who rely on him. If his followers are educated they think variously; if not directly opposed, they are only half-hearted. Though education in a way disciplines, it breaks up other things. It makes us more selfish, at least overcautious.

'I don't suppose Mr Menon is against education in all conditions. If we are an independent nation nothing will be so good or more acceptable than mass education. Then we begin to have a pride in ourselves which no amount of thinking could destroy. We can and we will love our country sincerely and somewhat selfishly too, for successful countries alone could thus be loved. There will be more of self-reliance and trust as a nation, be it ever so much split up with party quarrels and civil discord. And so I say together with Mr Menon, no education for us now—'.

The topic had already grown stale and Sivakami and her mother were talking in whispers. So were Sir and Lady Menon. Apparently it was not considered wrong not to pay attention to any one's long digressions. They were all of them long talkers and they could not reasonbly expect one to hear

them continuously if not completely interested.

Sivakami said something to her mother and she said addressing the whole company: 'To-morrow Miss Leelavati is coming on a visit here for a few days. Her father is Mr B——' whom I think Mr Das knows, the Deputy Collector at Tanjore.'

'Leelavati, Leelavati' Who is that? asked Mr Menon as if trying to recollect some association.

Sivakami who was near him heard him and asked, 'Why, do you know her? She was my classmate some two years ago at the Mary's College.'

'B. Leelavati, is it? That short, dark girl, with big eyes!' asked Mr Menon.

'Yes! the very same. When did you know her?'

'I!—— Oh, yes. I knew her er—— slightly, sometime ago'.

The others were talking amongst themselves and Sivakami rose and walked to the piano. Mr Menon followed. She sat on the stool, placed her hands on the keys, but without playing looked up at Mr Menon's face, as he stood leaning beside her.

'You knew Leelavati some two years ago when she was at the college?'

'Yes! Won't you play something?'

'She was a fine girl,' she said turning the leaves. 'Are you *the* Menon?'

'The Menon——?'

'Govinda Menon. Your were her—her——'.

Mr Menon slightly blushed.

'She has told you, has she? Yes, I am the Menon, the wicked Menon.'

'Yes! wicked,' she said, and abruptly began playing.

When she finished he asked her whether she would like to hear him play. She readily consented and rose up from her stool. He sat on it and closed the music book. And she turned and walked away to hide the redness that was flooding her face.

II

Mr Das was a man of culture. That was what he thought himself to be, and perhaps he was right. He knew the world; he had lived long enough in it. His experiences taught him to be broad-minded, sympathetic, lenient. He married early in life and his wife was the partner of his domestic worries only. He married by the parents' arrangements and he took her for what she was. Without being cynical about her, he was indifferent. In her sphere she was supreme and she thought him to be a good husband as far as her conception of husbands in general was. He saw that she wanted nothing materially and he gave her a great interest in life helping her with as many children as possible.

To friends who were facetious about the large number of children he had, he would gravely say, 'You see what evolution is. It results because of the struggle for existance. Struggle for existence is caused by the increase of population and I am helping at that!'

He was a clever lawyer whenever he was inclined to work and a leisurely politician at the best. He was thought to be a Congressite, but he flirted with all parties. He belonged to the minority which liked and approved the majority without belonging to it. 'The majority is in the wrong surely, but this is just the negative phase of progress. Without a large number of people being in the wrong the progress on the right could not be perceived or given the initiative at all.'

His practice and politics did not hinder Mr Das from being a man of leisure and luxurious habits. He had few cares in the world and what he had he systematically ignored. In consequence he had a lot of time on hand. He spent it as best as he could and the best place to spend it off was Sivakami's house. So he went there the morning that Leelavati came.

It was nine o'clock in the morning and Mr Das was smoking a large cigar leisurely as he was lying in his favourite easychair. He was looking at the smoke curls and was thinking of nothing in particular. Mrs Row was at the other end of the room reading voraciously a large paragraph in a newspaper.

A car brought two girls and they entered the room. Mrs Row rose up and went forward to greet them. 'So at last you have come, Leelavati!' she said. Mr Das got up and turned towards them. Mrs Row and the stranger girl were shaking hands while Sivakami stood beside them cheerful and bright. Mr Das stepped up to the group.

'How do you do, Mr Das?' said Sivakami seeing him. This was the usual way she noticed him first before company. He grinned. 'This is my friend Miss B. Leelavati—This is Mr Das.' They shook hands. 'Leelavati was my classmate for a long while.' All of them walked to the middle of the room talking.

Leelavati was a young girl of about Sivakami's own age. She was dark, but not black. Her features were proportioned and she had a charm about her. She was shorter than Sivakami. She had a small face, dimpled cheeks and a dainty nose. She was child-like, playful, and vivacious. All these Mr Das took in and whenever she talked he payed much attention to her. She had fascinated him without knowing it.

'How was your journey?' asked Mrs Row.

'Not very tedious, though I travelled all alone. Altogether I had a comfortable journey.'

'I hope your parents and the children are doing well, dear?'

'Oh, yes. Quite well, thank you.'

Sivakami got up. 'We shall go and get a change for Leelavati.' Miss Leelavati rose and placed her hand in Sivakami's arm. Mrs Row assented and Mr Das beamed his approval and they both left the room.

Sivakami took her upstairs, showed Leelavati her room and her own. They fell to talking about old days and of their old friends. They talked for some time while Leelavati changed her dress. A servant brought toasted bread and coffee and she ate and drank. When coming down she asked Sivakami, 'Who is that big man with the horrid face?'

'Horrid face,' smiled Sivakami. 'He is a lawyer and a politician. A very rich man and mother's friend.'

'Is he?' Then she talked of something else. And talking they entered the room.

After Sivakami and Leelavathi left the room Mr Das and Mrs Row talked about the visitor. They were conversing thus when Mr Menon came. He apologised for his early visit. He said he had a letter for Mr Das from his uncle and hearing that Mr Das was at the Sivakami Villa he had come there. Mr Das took the letter. Sir Menon had asked Mr Das to call on him in the course of the day for some purpose. After delivering the message Mr Menon without any sign of leaving lingered and Mrs Row invited him to sit. He thanked her and settled where he was.

Mr Menon had intended this visit for various reasons and when early in the morning he heard his uncle talk about making an appointment with Mr Das he volunteered to give the message. He understood Mr Das's interest in the Row family and he thought it would be nothing amiss if he were to call upon him at their house, even at the risk of not finding him there. But anyway Mr Das was there and Menon gave him the letter and stayed.

The door opened and Leelavati entered the room first. She came in talking and seeing Mr Menon she stopped and stared at him. He stood up smiling.

'How do you do, Miss Leelavati?' he enquired and went up to her with outstretched hand.

'How do you do?' she asked and smiled, with some difficulty. Sivakami seeing that she was embarassed, said, 'Good morning, Mr Menon. How kind of you to call.' Then taking her friend's arm she led her to the rest. Mrs Row claimed Leelavati and Mr Das was a silent party in their conversation. Sivakami and Mr Menon were left to themselves and Mr Menon drawing his chair near to Sivakami said, 'Your friend Leelavati is as fine looking as ever.'

'Do you think so?' replied Sivakami. 'She was better before seeing you'.

'Now or long ago?'

'Now and long ago!'

'Does she dislike me so much?' seriously asked Mr Menon.

'I don't know. But I think it would have been better for her if she had never met you.'

'I don't think she dislikes me so much.'

'I wonder!'

They were silent for sometime. Mr Menon again opened the conversation.

'We are having a picnic this Sunday at the Red Hills and will you come?'

'This Sunday?'

'You don't have any other engagement that day? We will change—'

'Who are all coming?'

'Why, everybody I suppose.'

'Everybody!'

'That is, my respected uncle and aunt, Mr Krishnaswami, Mr and Mrs Gopal (whom you know I suppose). I will now ask your mother and Mr Das and I hope you will persuade your friend.'

'But I am not sure of coming myself.'

'Why not?'

'I really don't know—but——'

'But?'

'Picnics are such a sort of tumbledown affairs and I don't like the crowd and bustle.'

'Don't you? Neither do I. This will be the only time and there will be no crowd. I will take care of that. I hope you have no other objection.'

Mrs Row after finishing her artillery on Leelavati now turned on Mr Menon and Sivakami.

'What are you both talking?' She asked.

Mr Menon smiled and replied, 'We are arranging a picnic.'

'A picnic!'

'Yes. This Sunday. We are all going. Will you come, Mrs Row'

'Which is the place?'

'Red Hills.'

'What do you say to that, Mr Das?'

'I suppose Mr Das will have no objection. And Miss Leelavati ought to come'.

'Oh, no!'

'Indeed you ought to. We will spend a fine and delightful day.'

'Uncle is keen on it. He says he needs a relaxation.'

'Yes, he does,' said Mr. Das. 'I suppose I will have nothing to do then. Sunday, you see, not that I am doing much on ther days.'

'Then it is fixed. You are all coming I suppose.' Mr Menon rose up. 'We will arrange the details later. I think I'll be going. Good morning to you all.' And he left.

'Did you and Mr Menon arrange it?' asked Mrs Row of her daughter.

'No, not exactly,' replied she blushing slightly.

'He said his uncle and some other people were going.'

'I suppose he arranged it all himself,' muttered Mr Das.

And Sivakami thought that he was probably right.

III

As Mr Menon stepped out of Sivakami Villa after the picnic proposal he saw Mr Krishnaswami driving in

his car. Mr Krishnaswami stooped his car seeing Mr Menon.

'Good morning! Returning home, I suppose?' he said.

'Yes!'

'Get in. I am also going that way,' invited Mr Krishnaswami and Mr Menon accepted it at once.

'An early visit?' asked Mr Krishnaswami as the car was moving.

'Yes, rather. I wanted to see Mr Das and I found him here.'

Mr Krishnaswami smiled. 'How are the ladies? Quite well, I hope.'

'Quite well.' They have a visitor to-day.

'A lot of people visit them.'

'But this is a friend of Miss Row and she has come to stay for a few days.'

'One of Miss Sivakami's school-friends, I belive,' said Mr Krishnaswami.

'Yes, one of her old classmates.'

'Oh yes, now I remember. She told something about it last night. What is her name——?'

'Her name? Something like Lak—Laxmi—no—I know it began with an L——' replied Mr Menon.

'Did it? I too remember. It was Lalithangi!'

'No, I don't think so,' said Mr Menon as if recollecting, 'I have got it now, Leelavati!'

'Yes, that is it!' concurred Mr Krishnaswami, 'Did you see her?'

'Yes I was in when she arrived,' replied Mr Menon.

'I wonder how she is like!' said Mr Krishnaswami, ruminating.

'She is young—'

'Of course she is. I thought you said that she was Miss Sivakami's classmate,' said Mr Krishnaswami smiling.

'She seems to be small,' replied Mr Menon in a careless manner. 'Her features are dark, but she is not ugly.'

'Charming?'

'Yes, charming,' conceded Mr Menon. 'But not like Miss Row.'

'Sivakami is beautiful.'

'She is more than beautiful,' said Mr Menon enthusiastically and blushed.

Mr Krishnaswamy glanced cautiously and found to his amusement that Mr Menon was going the way that so many have gone by.

'Sivakami is a fine girl,' he remarked after a while. But by this time Mr Menon had become careful and simply nodded his head. The car passed on and they drifted to other topics. They parted at Sir Menon's bungalow.

Later in the day Mr Krishnaswami visited the Rows. He was introduced to Leelavati. He found her not uninteresting but with Sivakami in the same room she sank to insignificance. They then left for a picture-house. Before they parted Mr Krishnaswami summed up in his mind that Leelavati was a frivolous sort of girl, and that she was jocularly serious and apt to drift into tragic conditions. They told him about the picnic party to the Red Hills and he readily gave his consent, for he, like Mr Das, was a man not hard-pressed for time.

IV

The day for the picnic came and the party went to the Red Hills. The day was fine, only it was a bit hot. They spent it as happily and variously as possible. But when they returned home each of them was in a different mood. Mr Das was complacent and hopeful, Mr Krishnaswami, thoughtful without being depressed, Mr Menon ruffled and ill-pleased with himself, Leelavati excited and gay, Sivakami perplexed and sore, and the rest—it does not matter. Many things happened that short day and each was differently impressed according to his or her hopes and desires.

Sivakami had a strenuous and trying day. When she returned home she longed for rest, not due to any physical

fatigue, but because she wanted to be alone and think.

But before retiring into her room Leelavati kissed her goodnight and mischievously saying, 'Isn't your Mr Das quite a horrid man? whisked behind the door.

Closing herself in, Sivakami sat on her bed and looked abstractedly at the wall. She was conscious of nothing in particular but her ears seemed to hear the words 'a horrid man', her eyes saw a mixedup alternating scene of the day's party, Mr Das, Mr Menon, and Leelavati prominently in it, and in the mind there was chaos and pain. Menon had been rude, but how kind and sympathetic was Mr Krishnaswami, she thought. That silly Das was the cause of all. And her mother!......... Sivakami's eyes filled with tears and her head drooped. She sat there for awhile with her back stooping, her neck bent and the tears running on her hot neck cheeks. His (Mr Das's) behaviour was so apparent and indifferent to herself that her mother looked daggers at Leelavati and darted warning glances at herself. And during lunch he, sitting between them, had completely ignored her and resolutely turning towards the other girl had passed on to her the delicacies! Not that she herself cared much for him and his doings. For her he was quite welcome to go to the devil. But her stupid mother and the mischievous and cruel Menon. How he seemed to enjoy it all. Her toes were mechanically tracing the pattern on the soft carpet and her eyes followed the design. 'Leelavati is a clever girl', he (Mr Menon) remarked later. Her toe missed the sloping curve in the design and passed on to the next pattern. She brought it back to the point of deviation and drove it by the proper line. How perfect was the curve and how symmetrical! Her eyes dried and she was interested in the design. The clock down below in the hall chimed the hour and Sivakami shook herself and slipped from her bed. She walked to the mirror rubbing her eyes and the cheeks of the crusted tears.

She stood before the glass and loosened her hair and the locks fell and unfolded on her shoulders sliding on to her breast. Her face usually serene was meloncholy with an expression of ill-usage and unspoken complaint. Everybody had gone about troubling her, paining her, and the world at large had no sympathy with her—no real sympathy. They thought that she was some kind of commodity, a toy to be tampered with, but not cared for seriously, who had no right to have any emotion or feeling except that of content gratitude, and who would be got for the asking. That was the thought in her mind and her face portrayed it. For she had been treated inconsiderately.

She sighed and removed her jewels and made some changes in her dress. She switched off the light and threw herself on her bed. She tossed about for a while and then lying flat on her back and turning her head towards the open window she thought.

Mr Das was nothing to her. She did not love him—the idea! But her mother was always worrying about him. His vagrant tendencies always frightened her. But she did not mind him and his vagrancies. He was sure to come back to her; she knew the strength of her influence. But what pained her most was his outward behaviour. She very nearly escaped a long lecturing from her mother. Her mother's talking to her in a manner that was openly sarcastic and insulting was the greatest kind of suffering. She would talk of her coldness and would impute to her an inferiority, almost. The suggestion of this hurt her more than anything else. She was conscious of her beauty, her accomplishments, and her charms. Many had been drawn to her without her exerting any force. It had been a lot of trouble for her to keep away the men. She smiled a little.

But what was the good of all that? Everybody desired her—all transitory more or less, she knew. And she actually felt nothing for them, not in any serious or permanent way. She in

a way distracted all men. But of course men will be men—there was no helping that. The sort of man in the books, the old type heroes were not real. If she were to love she could love one of their sort. He should be pure, unsallied in the past, invulnerable in the future, who could love her for herself, inspite of herself. This man, she could love, but where was he? Of course there could be no one like that, and then what was love—permanent love? Just imagination! She would never be in love. All the same if there were only a person she loved! How wonderful and exhilarating! She would be everything for him and he for her. She would not feel any solitude or depression or boredom. Just looking at him, and he at her they could spend hours and hours together in sublime bliss. And then if she had him she would not worry herself about the sarcasms—and —and depreciation.

Love, though a fancy was wonderful, though unreal yet a source of happiness. Oh! would she were only to love! How happy, how wondrous! But who would love her? She might love but no one would love her in that ideal way. She was just, just a—oh!

Her mind was oppressed and stopped thinking. When she resumed, it was in the original channel.

It was abominable of Mr Das. Of course he did not do or say anything explicit but his actions were sufficient to perturb her mother and. . . and. . .

Mr Menon's behaviour was exasperating, insulting. His cynical smile, comprehensive and provoking and his affected and exaggerated gallantry were insinuating. He seemed to have no spark of sympathy, no gentlemanliness. He drove her down to the very limit of patience and always seemed to be laughing at her. And to-day he took advantage of her neglected condition. As soon as he got a chance of talking with her alone he opened the conversation with 'Leelavati is a clever girl!'

'Indeed!' she exclaimed.

'Very clever girl,' he continued. See what she is doing now, over there near the building. She has charmed Mr Das,' and lowering his voice he said, 'and has alienated him from his other interests.' What cauld she do? With burning cheeks she walked briskly and he kept the pace.

'Has he other interests?' she asked quietly.

'Hasn't he? I thought he had.'

She did not know what to say and finding that she had walked long enough she slowed down and finally stopped to turn back. Menon wanted her to stay there for some time but she was reluctant. He led her to a low outstertching bough of a tree and she sat on it. He stood facing her. She felt him staring at her and she feared—did not care to lift up her eyes to him. The silence became oppressive to her and she looked up to say that they would better return. But he suddenly caught both her arms and by sheer strength drew her up. His eyes were passionate and cynical. The pressure on her arms grew greater, almost painful.

'Sivakami, I want you!' he said.

'Leave off my arms!' she angrily insisted and with difficulty wrenched off his fingers.

'Sivakami, I want you!' he repeated dropping his hands to his sides. She stood irresolute. She wanted to go away, but he was dominant. He clutched her fingers and bending over her kissed her. Kissed her, just for a second. She jerked away and angrily cried, 'You beast!' 'Yes, I am a beast. You have made me so.' 'Nonsense!' she said. 'Well, you may say so. You have made my mind whirl. I was all along waiting for an opportunity to tell you. Now I have got it, and I won't leave it. You have got to be mine, Sivakami.' He talked earnestly, vehemently. She dodged but he caught her hand restraining her from running away. 'What is your reply?' he asked. She tried to twist her hand off his

grasp, but he held it tightly. As she lay now she felt the place. The fingers were almost imbedded. 'What is your reply?' he demanded. 'No!' she said. 'Am I not good enough?' he asked. She was silent. 'Das, I suppose is superior.' 'Don't mention Mr Das. There is no need to discuss him,' she replied hotly. 'Well, what do you say to me?' 'No, a hundred times no!' she replied. 'I don't think you mean it. You are not so cruel-hearted,' he said and smiled with a slight touch of cynicism. 'No, I'm not cruel hearted. But I am cruel enough to—to hate you,' she cried. 'What, hate me?' he said mockingly and continued in the same tone, 'Come, come, Sivakami, you don't hate me. You simply can't. I am not so bad,' he tried to caress her face. She struck his hand and he withdrew it. 'I tell you Sivakami. I want you and I'll take you,' he said through his teeth. 'You won't, you bully,' she retorted. 'Wait, let us see!' He bit his lips and looked at her. His eyes seemed to burn. He caught her in his arms with a swoop and pressing his lips upon her kissed her violently with a smack. She was powerless in his strong arms. He threw back his head and looked at her defiantly, his arms still around her. He brought his face near hers once again but she crossed her palm between their lips. Tears of rage and helplessness started out of her eyes and she said almost choking, 'Oh don't, don't, Mr Menon! Am I—am I—so cheap?' She almost cried. His clasp relaxed and he stood before her releasing her completely. She did not look at his face, but she turned round and leaning on the branch sobbed. Mr Menon was trying to say something to her. 'Sivakami, Sivakami,—' he began almost pleadingly. She heard the leaves crunching and she saw approaching them a pair of brown, patent leather shoes and well creased china silk pants. She hastily wiped her teardimmed eyes. 'Excuse me, Mr Menon, I believe your uncle wants you.' It was Mr Krishnaswami's voice. There was a moment of silence. Then Mr Menon replied, 'Does he? Thank you!' and turning abruptly he left them. Sivakami was about to turn when Mr Krishnaswami's pointed shoes wheeled and softly stepped away. She calmed her agitation, dried her eyes and wiped her face. As she turned round to go, she saw Mr Krishnaswami bending over a plant, busy studying the flower. As she moved he saw and called to her. 'Did you notice this plant? This is a rare specimen of Hebiscus.' He straightened himself up holding a flower in his hand. 'I never expected to find this here. Look at these petals, yellowish-red and contorted.' Then followed a botanical digression as they both walked together to meet the others. She did not hear much of what he said, but she was conscious of his delicacy. When she thought she could control her voice properly she talked with him and when they reached the rest she was calm and natural, at least outwardly. Mr Menon was closely observing her, but she avoided his look. The rest of the evening was spent in a congenial manner, but her heart was pounding within. When they parted Mr Krishnaswami took her hand in his and pressed it softly. She looked at him and his eyes were kindly, almost affectionate.

Mr Krishnaswami she continued thinking, of course, was a different sort of person. He was the most cultured and well-behaved of all the men she had met. Except for one incident! And that incident was in a manner flattering to herself, she admitted. Could he love her? she asked herself. He might, he might, her heart beat in rhythm. And did *she* love him? Love him . . . Krishnaswami! She did not dislike him anyhow, and his behaviour at the party absolved him of his previous conduct, for then he was a bit ruder. Mr Krishnaswami . . a lover? The idea was not repulsive. She thought of him wistfully. His handsome face, kind eyes, all stood out. She got up from her bed and walked to the window. The night was getting cool. The moon was hidden behind the white fleecy clouds, silvering the edges. Could she love him? The moon fully came out and

the rafters were flying past it quickly. The moon was visible through them. They were hazy and thin like muslin. She sat on the broad windowsill, her face turned up to the Queen of the Night.

When she returned to bed it was very late in the night and as soon as she laid herself down she slept off, her brains being over-worked and her fancies crowding. Her last thought was of the Hebiscus specimen.

Mr Menon slept very poorly that night for he saw before his eyes a despairing and frightened face and in his ears rang the hardwrung words, 'Am I—am I—so cheap?

V

Sivakami woke up the next morning very late and when she came down she found her mother and Leelavati dressed to go shopping. They asked her to come with them but Sivakami stayed behind on a plea of headache. She took her breakfast alone and then fetching a novel from her bedroom she came to the sitting-room. A telegram came for Leelavati. She received it for her. Then she sat on a sofa and leaning against a corner stretched her legs on it. She opened the book to read. Reading a book she knew would only promote headache, but she had no pain, it was just an excuse. She opened the book and began reading. She read a couple of pages and missing the trend of the story she began paying minute attention to the words and the sentences. From this she dropped into subconciousness. All the lines in the page seemed to mount upon the line she was reading and the letters were jumbled. She brushed herself alive a few times and the lines descended to their proper places, it seemed reluctantly, only to mount together once again. Soon she ceased troubling herself and dropped into a brown-study, but her mind wandered without her being conscious of it. It was a kind of drowsy state, the result of either contentment or fatigue. She was more content than tired. Her sleep had made her fresh and optimistic about herself and she was really content.

For about fifteen minutes she was in that state and then she heard some one tapping the door. She turned round and called out, 'Come in!' and the door slowly opened discovering Mr Menon, hat in hand. She was startled and turned round towards him, the book slipping down. He closed the door, came up to her, and picking the book placed it on the sofa beside her. All yesterday's happenings came crowding to Sivakami's mind and she stood up facing Mr Menon with a hot face flushed with shame and anger. He looked appealingly at her. He was not neatly dressed as usual. His hair was not properly combed and his bow was tilting over one side. Neither was his face bright and self-possessed as usual. In his eyes there was no confidence now. All these Sivakami noted though she was angry.

Her first inclination was to ask him to go away but she hesitated and he said, 'Please Miss Row, just allow me a few minutes. I want to talk to you.'

'Talk to me?'

'Yes! About yesterday's...'

'You talked enough yesterday.'

'I talked too much, I know. And did too much too!'

There was silence for a minute or so when they kept standing.

'Won't you please sit down. I can talk to you better if you are sitting,' said Mr Menon.

'I don't think there is anything to talk.'

'Yes, there is much, please.'

Sivakami was irresolute. She wanted to send him away, but he seemed to be too earnest for that. And then she was afraid he might behave once again foolishly. But he was pressing and she reluctantly sat down. This was his first success, to make her consent to hear him. He got this easily, more easily than he expected or deserved, according to his conception of the criminality of

his acts. He drew a low stool before her and sat on it. He threw his hat on the piano and then hesitantly began to talk.

'I am very sorry for what happened yesterday. I am afraid I was not in my proper senses.' She was quite convinced of that and was apprehensive of his being in the same condition now also. 'Or rather, I think, I was as usual. I have been cultivating systematically a habit of flippancy and self-esteem and that resulted in my troubling you yesterday. And now I am sincerely repentant . . . as I had never been for anything all my life before.' There was a pause.

'Your repentance does you credit,' she said and attempted to rise up.

'No, please don't go. I have something more to say,' pleaded Mr Menon. 'Will you forgive me?'

'Does it matter?' she asked.

'It does—very much to me,' he replied.

'Of course, if you want it.'

'But I want you to forgive me whole heartedly, without any—reserve.'

'But don't you think you are asking too much?'

'Yes, it *is* too much. But I beg you to do it for me. I know I have behaved abominably and I don't deserve any sort of forgiveness at all.'

'Then why ask for it?'

'Why ask for it? Why, because I esteem you. Because I hold you in such respect as I have never held anybody, which I never thought was possible for me. Because your forgiveness really matters to me. And also because—I love you.' He hung his head and the words seem to escape him unawares.

Sivakami was startled and then she smiled and said, 'It is one of your jokes I suppose.'

'Jokes!' he looked up at her and continued with desperation. 'Jokes! Not at all. I wish it were a joke. But I love you sincerely and truly.'

Sivakami laughed.

'Oh, please don't laugh. You don't know how much you are paining me. I swear. I love you Pray believe me.

'Do you believe yourself?'

'In fact I don't!' he said mournfully. 'It seems incredible. All my life I have laughed at love and now I am myself in it.'

'For how long, I wonder?'

'For ever!'

Sivakami was still sceptical and was inclined to treat the matter with ridicule.

'I suppose you have been loving me from the first time you saw me,' she said. 'And yesterday also you were in love with me and it was *love*, I believe, that made you do what you did then.'

'No, I did not love you from the beginning,' he replied. 'What I did yesterday was done mischievously.'

'You did not love me then!' she queried.

'No!' he replied.

'Then from when are you loving me? From today? You know it is unromantic if you don't fall in love with a person the first time you see her.'

'If you want to know really I'll tell you.'

She was bantering and laughing at him, but he was aware that she was doing it in the bitterness of her heart.

'You are beautiful and I knew it the first time I saw you. Yesterday when I found you alone I turned the opportunity to—to—trouble you. And you resisted. You said something in the end and it struck home to my heart. From that moment you are more than beautiful to me. From that moment I love you!'

This was very interesting to Sivakami and she asked, 'What was it that I said which struck. I'd like to say it often—defensively.' He looked at her as if he would have avoided the answer.

But he had committed himself and he had to reply.

'You said, 'Am I—so cheap?' I shall never forget your look.

She became red hot and her cheeks burnt; she remembered the words. She got up and walked to the window. Mr Menon followed her there and stood behind her. She was perturbed and angry. She turned round to him and said with extreme politeness and evident pain: 'I am much obliged to you Mr Menon for pitying me.'

'Oh! don't misunderstand me,' he cried. 'It is I who ought to be pitied.'

'Yes, for loving me.'

'Don't, please don't. I never thought for a single moment of pitying you. That idea never occurred to me. What you said showed me my own depravity insensitiveness, beastliness. Your look of protest and anger awoke my better nature, the only thing that was good in me. And now 'I love you!' he concluded.

Sivakami did not know what to say. From the beginning he had passed through various and contradictory sensations and emotions. She thought first that he was laughing at her and that he was trying another and a more cunning method for deluding her. He sometimes seemed to act. She wondered if there could be any truth in his love confession. It might be another pitfall! Or perhaps it was just his imagination. Or it was temporary, temporary as his other love affairs were.

Sivakami walked back to her seat and Mr Menon sat in front of her. She felt piquant. His love seemed incredible. Could anybody love her? Impossible, she thought. Love her—her!

'Have you loved anyone before?' she asked.

'No!' he replied.

'Not even the clever Leelavati?'

'No, not even the *clever* Leelavati. Why do you ask?'

'Leelavati once told me that you loved her.'

'She told me as much as she knew, as much as I had told her. But I never loved her to anyone else.'

'Then what was it?'

'Humbug!'

'And this?'

'Real love!'

'How do you know? You perhaps thought the same thing in her case.'

'No, I didn't. I never thought I was in love with anybody. Indeed never!'

'Perhaps you told the same thing to Leelavati.'

'Not the same thing. It is true I told her that I loved her. And she believed me as did many others.'

'Oh!' there were many others too?'

'Yes, a few. I was careless and reckless. I sought pleasures and took them wherever I found them. I have lied for attaining my objects. I enjoyed 'life' but never for a moment was I sincere in my 'loves'. They were all just fun for me. I took them light-heartedly.'

'Was it right?'

'I don't know. I don't feel any repentance for my past conduct. They all seem natural to me. They were just a phase in my life before loving you.'

'I might also be just a phase!'

'But that is what you are not. This is the first time I really love and this is the last.'

'Are you sure?'

'Perfectly!'

'But I am not.'

'I know it is my fault. But all the same I love you for ever.'

'You flatter me?'

'Please don't. I love you sincerely and truly. You can put me to any test. I won't say what all I'll do for you; but I'll do just what you want me to do. Maybe, you'll believe me afterwards and also love me a little.'

'You are becoming very romantic Mr Menon,' said Sivakami, 'and I wonder

whether you really meant what you said just now.'

'Believe me, I mean what all I say.'

'About the test ?'

'About the test also. Command me. I will be happy to do anything for you.'

'Anything !' she speculated for a while.

'You see, you told Leelavati that you loved her and she believed you. But you later on left her.'

'Yes !'

'Left her in the lurch !'

He was silent and she pursued drastically.

'You cheated her ! Why don't you make it good by marrying her !'

'Because I don't love her,' he replied simply.

'But you told her you did.'

He was silent.

'Won't you marry her ?' Yet he was silent.

'Won't you ?' she asked again.

'Do you want me to ?'

Though that was her intention, she faltered, 'Yes.'

'You don't know what you are asking me to do. You are driving me away ?'

'But you wanted me to test you.'

'And the success of the test ?'

'The success ! As if you love me !'

'I really do !'

'Then marry her !'

'And if I did ?'

'I'll know that you love me,' she said laughing unnaturally.

'Perhaps then, you will love me a little, just a little !'

She had to reply in one way only and she said, 'Yes.'

He heaved a sigh of happiness, but he was sorrowful too.

'You want me to marry and I will, simply to prove that I love you. And you might love me !' He took her hand, and there arose a warning in her mind ; but he touched her fingers delicately, reverentially. He lifted her hand to his lips and touched her fingertips. She felt uncomfortable and withdrew her hand. He stooped and picked up the hem of her dress and pressed it fervently to his lips. She felt more uncomfortable than ever. Steps were heard in the passage and the door opened. It was Mr Das. He was in time to see the last act as Mr Menon let down the cloth from his lips. But those behind him saw only his back ; they could not see through him.

'Good morning !' cried Mr Das.

'Good morning ! said the startled Mr Menon in a low key. Mr Das looked at him furiously and ushered in Mrs Row and Leelavati.

Mutual greetings were over and Sivakami took out an envelope and giving it to Leelavati said, 'This telegram came as soon as you left.'

Leelavati opened the telegram with some perturbation and after reading it said, 'They want me to come home at once.'

'Why ?' asked the solicitious Mrs Row.

'Don't know ! They just want me to come. I suppose I have to start right away.'

'The earliest train is the Boat Mail,' said Mr Das.

'They want me to come just when I begin to feel at home here.'

'There might be some important reason,' said Mrs Row who was only very glad the message came.

At this stage Mr Menon said that he had to be going.

'I too will be going,' said Mr. Das.

'But I'll drop in the evening to say good-bye to Miss Leelavati.'

Mr Das and Mr Menon came out of the house together and Mr Menon was

about to take leave of Mr Das with a curt good-bye, when he invited him to come with him in his car. The sun was hot and Mr Menon accepted. When they had proceeded some distance, Mr Das remarked, 'You are quite gallant, Menon!'

'Gallant!'

'Kissing the hem of a lady's dress.'

Mr Menon looked angrily at him. 'Could n't help seeing you', said Mr Das. 'I hope to find the lady complacent."

'I love her!' hotly cried Mr. Menon.

'Love her? You mean that,' laughed Mr Das.

'Nothing of that sort.' 'I really love her.' Mr Das was surprised and sat musing.

'Love Sivakami?'

'Why not?'

'Indeed, why not? She is as good as any body else.'

'She is the best, noblest of all the women.'

'Yes, yes—I know,' said Mr Das, hastily. 'And does she love you?' he asked.

'She does not, but may be, she will later on,' replied Mr Menon.

'Then you will be married, I suppose.'

'Perhaps!'

'But you don't love her sufficiently not to marry her?'

'Not to marry!'

'If you really love her, and if she does love you, which I hope she does for her own sake, and as being in love gives a fine sensation, you ought not to be married.'

'I don't understand you,' said Mr Menon perplexed.

'It is something uncanny, I know. But love *is* destroyed by marriage.'

'Why?'

'For marriage is intimacy and love is adoration and awe. Real love should not be destroyed. But of course if you want to marry her, do so. My good wishes will be with you and Sivakami.'

'Thank you,' said Mr Menon.

'But love is a kind of disease too, you know,' remarked Mr Das.

They were silent till they reached Mr Menon's bungalow. There just as Mr Menon was about to go, Mr Das asked him to stop a minute. He immediately opened a notebook and scribbing something in it tore the page and gave it to Mr Menon. He read it and looked enquiringly at Mr Das.

'That is the address of an eminent doctor,' he said seriously, 'a personal friend of mine. He is a specialist in . . . mental cases. If you pay him a visit he will do you a world of good. Take my advice. After all, your case may not be serious. Good-day and my sympathies and . . . and condolences!'

With that he signed to the chauffeur who started the car.

Mr Menon stood looking at the fast receding car and tore the paper, which Mr Das had given him with much concern, to tiny bits and scattered the fragments in the air.

'Fool!' he said and turned towards the house.

VI

Leelavati packed all her things and was ready to start for the train. Sivakami and she were very frienly that day, though there was no lack of friendship during the short period of her visit. Only Sivakami could not wholeheartedly respond to her friend. It needed a greater amount of hypocrisy than Sivakami possessed, and Leelavati was always talking about Mr Das. But on the parting day they fell to talking about their schooldays and common friends. So the day was pleasant enough, though sometimes Sivakami seemed to be a little abstracted.

Towards evening Leelavati grew restless. She was really sorry that she had to leave so soon. Her parents would not have been flattered if they had heard her comments.

Leelavati was greatly disappointed when Mr Das did not call upon her to bid good-bye as he had promised. Instead he sent her a letter informing her that he was forced to give up his visit as he was unexpectedly called off elsewhere.

Leelavati had become in her own way fond of Mr Das. He was to her an old man trying to become younger. His attentions flattered her and tickled. She liked his light-heartedness. In the few days she was in the city they had become close friends. She teased him playfully and he greeted all her teasings with smiles and encouragements. He had given her one or two slight presents and she was perfectly conscious that he admired her. And she was sorry that the friendship they had begun had to cease so abruptly, perhaps never more to be revived.

Both Mrs Row and Sivakami accompained Leelavati to the railway station. When the train started they parted with promises of paying more visits and returning them. In the second class compartment where Leelavati was, there were about half a dozen people. Only two were women, but it did not matter to Leelavati as she was a bold girl and had many times travelled alone. She did not try to make acquaintance with any of the inmates and they were occupied in individual musings or company conversations. She leant against the window and looked at the fast flying dark, huge shapes of trees and other objects. The moon had just risen and it was faint. But she did not care for the moon. The engine's motion and sound occupied her attention. It steamed on without diminishing its speed or stopping at any intermediate station until it reached the Chingleput Junction. It took it just an hour but for Leelavati it seemed to be much shorter. For she had fallen in a reverie.

She thought of all the friends she had just left, of Mr Das and Mr Menon. The memory of her college days came to her when she loved Mr Menon. Sivakami was her confidant and she blushed to think of the days when she had poured out her love story into Sivakami's ears and had cried to her when she was jilted. But she was not so sentimental now. She was not at all sentimental. She had suffered and had got over it. It was now not a quite unpleasant experience. But it hurted her to think that Sivakami was a witness to her weakness. What of it? she asked herself defiantly. What if she knew? Of course she would not talk about it to anybody and laugh at her. Sivakami could be trusted. But she knew. That itself was enough. She even sometimes seemed to look at her in a peculiar manner. During the stay they did not mention a single word about the old affair at all. But she knew that Sivakami had recognised in Mr Menon her old faithless lover. It was quite apparent by the way she avoided him or any mention of him in their conversations. Not that she herself talked much about him, she often talked about Mr Das, she knew. But did she do it too often? Leelavati blushed again (girls often do even when they are alone). Did Sivakami see anything in it? Any way what was there to see? Of course she flirted, but she did it purely for the fun of it. What was the harm there? And he seemed to like her. Any man would! They were just friends. She was sure there was nothing between them, no understanding or anything, leastways not more than what was or seemed to be between him and Sivakami. Was there anything at all, she wondered. Often she had tried to sound Sivakami on her affairs of the heart. But she had never divulged any secrets, if secrets there were any. But surely there ought to be something. Sivakami was human just as anyone else. But was there anything between herself and Mr Das. Whenever she (herself) talked of him she was reticent and simply allowed her to talk on. She had also overheard a bit of a conversation between the mother and the daughter. The mother was saying, 'Das is going to give you up, if you are so careless and cold.' 'Let him, I don't care,' Sivakami had hotly replied. They had

stopped the conversation abruptly as she entered the room. It was plain enough, but yet she doubted. Surely even if there were anything at all she did not think that the mother would promote it.

As the train stopped she roused herself up and blinked at the bustling platform. People were coming in and going out, all in haste. Suddenly her attention was caught by a familiar figure. He was Mr Das and he approached her with a genial smile.

'Good-evening, I had to motor here,' he said, 'and am now coming in the same train.'

'How fine!' she cried.

'Are you travelling alone?' he asked glancing at her fellow-passengers.

'Absolutely. There is no one I know here.'

'Except me!'

She smiled.

'I am also travelling alone. Why not we go together?' he suggested.

'Yes, come in. . . or perhaps. . .'

'I have a first-class compartment all for myself—reserved,' he said slowly. But she gave no encouragement.

'Why not you come over?' he said, jerking his finger towards the top-end of the train.

'You want me to come over to your carriage?'

'Yes, why not?' he asked.

'But is it proper—'

'What is improper in it? Why not friends travel together?'

'And yet—'

'Conventional, eh?'

'No!'

'Then there is no reason why you shouldn't shift at once.'

She yet hesitated.

'Come along. The train is going to start. I am sure you'll find it more comfortable.'

She looked at the portmanteau above her head. Mr Das called a porter.

'Show him your things,' he said to her. She was yet undecided. She looked at the people in the compartment. Nobody seemed to notice her except a woman opposite to her, who seemed to have overheard a good deal of their conversation. She was looking at her suspiciously, mockingly. Leelavati tossed her head and decided. She called in the porter. Then she got down first and walked away with Mr Das towards his compartment and the porter followed with her things.

Mr Das's compartment was a comfortable small place completely unconnected by any passage with the other parts of the carriage. Mr Das held the door open for her and when the things were safely transferred in he asked her to execuse him for a few minutes and went to the Higginbotham's bookstall. There he purchased a novel by Mr Wodehouse and returned to her. He got into the compartment and within a minute the engine whistled, snorted, and glided along.

Mr Das threw the book on an empty seat. Leelavati took up the book.

It was, *A Damsel in Distress.*

'Have you read it?' he asked her.

'Yes, I have.'

'How is it?'

'Splendid. All Wodehouse books are!'

'I know!' he said and the conversation dropped for a while.

'You would have gone away without saying good-bye to me, eh?' asked Mr Das.

'It was your fault. You failed to show up.'

'I had to, to meet you here.'

'To meet me?' she asked.

'Yes, to meet you. I have to go this way a couple of days later. I economised the time and started earlier. I am rewarded in having you as my companion.' There was another silence.

'This is perhaps the last time we see each other,' said Leelavati, though not mournfully.

'Not if you wish.'

'If I wish!'

'Yes. little girl,' he said leaning towards her. 'Look at this diamond,' he showed her his ring. 'There is life in it. It is that which dazzles. Without it the stone will be mere glass. You are that light.' Leelavati blushed at the flattery. He stroked her cheeks and she caught his fingers and leant back on her seat. But he drew her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

Leelavati had not quite expected this. She was naturally surprised and indignant.

'If you do all these,' she said, "I will go back to my old place at the next stop.'

'What am I doing?' he asked her affecting innocence.

'Making violent love!' she boldly replied.

'Is it my fault? I would like to see the man who would not make violent love to you. He ought to be a precious, cold and unimaginative imbecile.'

'Neverthless I don't want you to do it again,' she said.

He looked at her but did not reply.

'By the bye I have got something for you,' he said after some time. He put his hand inside his inner pocket and drew a carefully wrapped up jewel case. He undid the paper covering and opened the lid. Inside was a necklace studded with sparklers. Leelavati gasped. He gently lifted it up by one end and held it before her eyes. She looked at it and then at him.

'It is for you,' he said.

'For me! let me see it,' she said and stretched out her hand. There was the light of desire and possession in her eyes. He drew the necklace back and said, 'You can see it when I have put it round your neck.'

'When you have put it around my neck!'

'Yes!'

'Suppose I don't want it.'

'But you will,' he said with knowledge. 'All fine girls love fine things.'

She looked at him and at the jewel. 'Well here you are!' she said and leant forward. He feigned to put it round her neck, but said, 'I'll have to tumble over you if I am to pin it up properly. Come over here. It will be easier.' She giggled and came and sat beside him. He motioned her to turn her back towards him. And she did. He threw the jewel case on the seat she had just vacated and took the loose end of the necklace in his other hand. Lifting both his hands he brought the necklace round her neck and was about to lock it up.

"I'd like to see your face," he said, a thought suddenly striking him, and placing his hands on her shoulders drew her towards himself. She giggled and attempted to get farther away. But he gently and persistently drew her towards him and she leaned on him. With studied slowness he buttoned the necklace while her fingers were feverishly playing with the jewel. She tried to rise up but he restrained her. As she was caressing the stones he drew her closer. He took her chin between his thumb and forefinger and kissed her on her lips. She pushed him off and attempted to rise up.

'Prudish!' he taunted her, and she giggled and nestled her little head on his chest.

At the next stopping place two young men got out from a third class compartment at the tail-end of the train and walked up to the top glancing through all the open windows. When they reached Mr Das's carriage they stopped and winked at each other knowingly almost mournfully, for the shutters were down and there seemed to be no light inside. They were particularly interested in the girl. They had seen

her for the first time in their lives at the Egmore Railway Station. 'Dashed fine girl!' one had said to the other. The other had smiled with approval and admiration. They spent the time between Egmore and Chingleput in speculating about her name, place, station in life, and her destination. They devised plans for securing her attentions and talking with her. When they saw an important-looking man talking with her they were disappointed and when she shifted her place they were chagrined. Until the next stop they directed their imagination as to who the 'big' man was and how he was related to the girl. And when they found the shutters down they were profoundly stirred. One said to the other, 'I thought so', and the other also lodged a claim to the same idea. The rest of their journey they spent, whenever they were awake, in condemning modern fashions, westernization of India, the atrocities of the wealthy, and diverse other kindred subjects. They saw the last of Leelavati when her brother fetched her away at the Tanjore Junction. They missed Mr Das from the next junction and in their minds was a mixed feeling of hatred for Mr Das, the wealthy, sympathy for Leelavati, and contempt for the rest of her sex.

VII

TRUST COLLEGE,
Palamcottah.
17th May 19—

Siva Dear,

When I most dutifully obeyed the call of my revered father and hastily packed off I had no idea of the real reason which was that he was transferred to Palamcottah. It often happens that he is transferred but it is difficult to guess. Transfers are generally good because they imply a change, at least of place. My mother was waiting for me to give a hundred and one odd jobs and though I generally love work I love it best in contemplation. But I helped though she ungratefully said later that I hindered more than I helped. What with packing, parcelling, and travelling we have now opened the whole show at Palamcottah, and hence the delay in writing to you.

I have been in this place before as you perhaps know already, for what is there you don't know about me, and if there is any I don't know it myself, for you are the dearest friend of my heart and there is nothing I hold away from you. This is a small place and a quiet one. The people who live here are fashionable and up-to-date as far as one's ideas go, (and our ideas are best I am sure) and amongst them I have met two of our old friends G. Suseela and Daisy Sanker, and if you don't remember them you might recognize in the former the girl who used to wear thick eyeglasses though she'd read only in candle light as somebody told her that electric light was harmful to her galics of optical vision, and the other is the girl whom we used to call the Butterfly for she flirted with every subject and knew a little of everything ignoring Pope's words, 'Drink deep or taste not ...' and God knows what the rest is. Daisy Sanker is now Daisy Paul and she has got a little she-Paul with a parrot nose and oblong face and her husband is an unbearable chap who is always talking with and holding her arm when they go out walking if they ever do; so much interested they are together in their blessed offspring. Suseela has no children as yet, and her husband is now in the faraway land which seems to recede farther from us as we grow older and older, but I have decided to go there; that will be one of the conditions I will make to my prospective husband. Suseela's husband is there now and is sending delightful long letters which she shows only to me and there he addresses her as 'My Darling' and rounds off the rest of the dears, sweethearts, and heart-burns (that is not in them) with 'your ever loving husband' and husband with big 'h'. He is enamoured of the place and to my thinking it seems he would like to remain there if she would let him; and his letters are full of descrip-

tions and praise of the old place and the kindness of the prosperous in the colleges, though he seems to be a little disgruntled at the way the general public treats him. He is a man who approaches the European standard in dressing but I am unable to understand from the photo she showed to me why he is as white as Hamilton in his 'blackie' comedies, and as ungainly and portly, and no wonder she asked, 'Who is the handsome man?' meaning Govinda Menon, who is now here. I met him the other day and he stopped a few minutes to talk to me.

This time of the year it is unbearably hot here and in the daytime I sleep, or read, or build castles. I don't like novels (the only kind of books that can be read) either modern or otherwise for if in the old novel, the hero necessarily is a good being, in the modern one he is. . . is efficient, and the heroes we meet are neither efficient nor good. Perhaps the heroines also are not up to the mark you may say, neither they are. If the hero is neither efficient nor good he becomes a fool and is entertaining only in the hands of some. But anyway I read novels and kill time. I also build castles, (figuratively speaking, for I don't like living in castles; they ought to be awfully boring about the present and the near future, how I would be in this circumstance, in the other and the other. I don't like thinking about the faraway future when most probably I would be domesticated and would become an insufferable, bug-bear of an old woman.

In the evening we go out for a stroll round the playground here and to the field and near the cantonment and lake so called. Plenty of girls come out and plenty of men too—to see us girls—and we walk on in small groups or stand looking at the game they play in the grounds. Often the games are exciting and the evenings pass off quickly. Then we return home to sleep and dream of sweet friends. This is the life here and I think I would prefer the bustle and the activities of the city. You are all fortunate people to live there always.

I have got another thing to tell you, dear, and that is a very secret and delicate affair. It concerns my future happiness and urged on by my parents, specially by my mother. They want me to marry soon but they dare not impose a husband on me. When my mother began worrying me about it I told her that I would marry if the choice is left entirely to me and she reluctantly consented but I did not get my father's endorsement, and then I could rely on mother to turn father's perspective as she has been doing for the last thirty years or more. But I have an idea that my mother wants me to marry some narrow-minded, straightlaced relative of mine who has the audacity to approach for your dear friend's hand and I have a great mind to consent and give him a dog's life, scraping out all his concepts of married life and breaking all customary procedure, for he is the son of the man who advised my father not to educate me, and he carried some weight too, then. But I am not really so cruel-hearted and I will not marry him. I suppose I will have to pick and choose out of the list of visitors my father has got in his pocketbook. But I don't think I should marry just yet; life above is so beautiful.

I wonder when you are going to marry. You don't tell me anything about it at all, that I think you are too clever to love anybody, for clever people like you are never sentimental.

Well deary, I have written a long while and I think I will finish. I hope your reply also will be as long as my letter is, for I simply love reading such sensible letters as you ever write. Remember me to your mother and our mutual friend.

Your dearest Leela.

PS. How is your horrid Mr Das? I met him in the train.

Palamcottah,
19th May 19—.

Dear Miss Row,

I left Madras about four days ago for Tanjore and then came over here

when Miss Leelavati's father was transferred. I am now staying with a friend of mine and intend taking steps towards what you wanted me to do very soon, in fact to-day evening.

Yesterday I called on Miss Leelavati and we have arranged to out for a walk to-day evening, when I intend proposing to her. I will do my best to please her and look acceptable to her which I think is only consistent with the test.

When I told you I loved you I told you the truth, but you did not believe it. I am not in anyway complaining or finding fault with you for that, for well I know that it is the logical result of my past hasty, unthinking and now deplorable conduct. I did not love you at first sight. I am glad I didn't. For then I would not have known the depth of real love. I am thankful I know it now, even at the risk of losing you. For love you, I must, I am afraid.

It is too much for me to think that you love me or ever could, though promised to, just a little, if I were to succeed, but then you will forget soon for love cannot be forced in by promises. But if ever for a moment I thought you loved me I would not have submitted to your test at any cost for that would have meant suffering for you also, and not to risk it my love might just as well remain unproven. My marrying Miss Leelavati is not a matter of any particular satisfaction to you, for I believe, you know that that lady does not care for me nor does she want me. So the success of the test would just mean that I love you and the result would be that we would be kept asunder as it ought to be, for you could not love me nor ever could.

Forgive me my past and even if you forget me, the while you remember think of me as one who loves you always and is proud of it.

Yours,
Govind.

TRUST COLLEGE,
Palamcottah,
20th May 19—.

Siva Darling,

I now write to you before I could get your reply, which I think would come tomorrow, for I have got something specially to tell you, that I am sure would surprise you as much as it did me, though I see no reason why I should be surprised at all. The fact is that I have had a proposal . . . from whom do you think? From *the* Menon! I think I told you in my last letter that I met him here. I saw him while I was going out for a walk and he stopped a few minutes at our house, but my mother did not know it, and if she did, she would have cried H—at my having a young man to call on me, and to avoid mother I told him that I would meet him the next day, which was yesterday somewhere while going out. After he left I did not think much about it, for I thought that he was just trying to spend his time as lightly as he could. He kept the appointment the next day. He was waiting for me and I parted from my other friends and walked off with him and for a while he did not talk anything but make the most conventional and stupid remarks. Then as if he were doing something unusual but what he did every hour of his life, he asked me in a formal way if I would marry him. No. I did not know how to reply nor would you have known in the circumstances when a man takes you for walk and looking at a bird flying to a far off tree says without any preparation, 'Will you marry me, old kid?' Well, that is what he did and I was all stuck up and asked him to repeat what he said, which he did, and when I regained control of my flabbergasted mind I asked him how he took such a keen sporting interest in me to which he replied that it did not matter when he wanted me enough to marry me. I did not give him any definite answer just then, but we had a short talk in which I promised to tell him what I thought of it to-day evening.

To-day evening is fast approaching and I don't know what to tell him though I have been thinking all the time. Marrying him would not be pleasing to my parents as he is Malabaree but I can get over it by doing it without their permission which will be a jolly good thing to do to them. They need a shock as their life is getting too prosaic. I don't know but I doubt he would make a good husband, but I doubt it very much for I already know he is fickle-hearted. But now I am more interested why he wants to marry me. I do not think it is because of love but I think it is more a marriage of compensation on his part, he being caught in a wave of repentance or religious fever, which God forbid. He seemed to me to be much depressed while proposing to me that I wonder how he would be if he were to marry me. But I think his depression is due to real repentance and swallowed pride in coming back to me.

I would like a husband who would be of real use to me. He ought to be rich and take me round the world which I think Mr Menon can if he wanted. But I doubt whether he would love, honour and *obey*, but I might train him. But that is not all a wife wants, dear, and I don't know whether he would be just the man for me. I think we generally feel uncomfortable in each other's presence. If I would only love him as much as one hundreth of what I did before, I would now marry him, but having no speck of love for him I don't know what to do. To my mind though love is not necessary for marriage it at least keeps up the illusion for a while and if I had married him before I would now be a demurring, domesticated animal. I really loved him once and what tears I have shed when he left me and how many sleepless nights, while he was most probably laughing at my expense, thinking of this. I have a great mind to treat him as he treated me.

All these apart, I don't think it is just yet time for me to marry. Telling of time it is time for me to dress and go, and here are kisses for you, dearest.

Your loving, Leela.

VII.

Mr Menon proposed to Leelavati and after a day's deliberation she consented to marry him but she wanted him to keep both the proposal and the consent secret till the marriage. Mr Menon agreed. Whatever hope he might have had of going back to Sivakami or at least remaining free from any obnoxious tie, as obnoxious they would be in his present state of mind, were all shattered when Leelavati consented to marry him. He took what came to him resignedly without any show of pain or disappointment. But to Leelavati's eyes he seemed cheerful enough. For she was too clever to see.

Mr Menon did not inform Sivakami of Leelavati's accepting him as he thought of sending her a short letter as soon as the wedding would be over. That would be the last between him and her, her who was the only one he loved. He sighed and was fast turning into a fatalist. Mr Menon's proposal was to Leelavati, as she herself said, surprising. She had more or less forgotten everything and he was the last person she expected to be her suitor. Leelavati had a poor opinion of Mr Menon. When he loved her (as he said) and left her she, beginning with sorrow passed through self-despisal, hatred for him, and indifference. When she saw him afterwards, for the first time at Sivakami's house, she thought and was afraid that he might renew his attentions. She found with relief that he had no such intention. She found him gay and glisting with Sivakami, who did not always encourage him. She thought that he intended to include her also in his long list of amours. She had a mind to warn Sivakami, but felt reluctant because it would resuscitate her after affairs for discussion. It was a surprise to her that the Menon who was gay and flirting in the city should after a few days become profoundly serious and go about

proposing to her in the most prosaic manner.

Palamcottah,
22nd May 19—.

Dearest Siva,

I am simply pouring letters on you one after another for I have such news to tell you all about myself and Menon. When I wrote to you last that I had consented to marry Menon, there was something more that I wanted to tell you but I kept that back with great tenacity and self-denial, as I was rather proud of what I wanted to tell you and which I am telling now.

I have written and told you often that I don't want to marry now in the near future, for marriage, my dear, is the last thing a sensible girl should undertake because, it is committing onself to so many unsuspected things. When I think of marriage I often remember the proverb 'Look before you leap' and I neither want to leap nor look. Marriage is for women who are fairly old, who are in their middle age when they could bear all sorts of grave (silly) responsibilities, beget children, breed them, look after the husband, and behave in all sorts of manner as an underdog. But our present life is too good for us to risk it. And if I were to marry, the sort of man I would like to marry is a hushand who would pet me, indulge me in my whims and fancies, never reproach me, (he might chide, playfully) take me seriously apparently but never serious at all, leave me as long a tether as I need, allow me to roam about and enjoy all the good things in life, never be narrow-minded or subject to petty jealousies, liberal, generous, and oh! ever so many things. Just a kind of a father to me, but only intimate. But that sort of a husband only an old man would make you, and that is exactly what I want. Don't confuse. I don't mean a tottering old man (why not, I don't know) but he should be between forty and fifty, with plenty of experience in the world, at least sufficient to make him a human being enough to live with, and enough to make him look upon his wife as another human being only a bit young and craving for all that is fine, exciting, and beautiful. Only old people could understand the young and only the young understand the old, and if they don't, it doesn't matter as the other would adjust.

I told Menon that we should be married secretly because my most revered parents would not give their sanction or benign approval to our union. He came in part with my idea and we settled that we should elope and get married in Madras. The day was all fixed and it fell to-day as he urged me to have the day at the earliest.

Accordingly to-day morning we were to have met near the railway station and then we should have scampered away. We would have met and would be in the city ourselves instead of this letter at the time you read it; only I failed to meet him as I had settled within myself previously. I sent him a letter, a small bit of paper through a boy. Written on it were a few words which set out our positions clearly and were also explanatory:

Dear Mr M,

Sorry to disappoint you. Fickleness is more the quality of women and you should excuse me. Further things are done unto you as you do them unto others.—L.

That was all. Don't think that I was cruel, darling, for indeed I was not. It was just a spirit of mischief and I did not love him nor wanted to marry him, and all the same I would have refused him, only that; simply to teach him a lesson I resorted to this. It was only belating my refusal and if it gave him any hopes which he could not very well forget now I am very sorry for it, indeed I am. But I hear from the messenger that all the same he left for the city and there you see I did not really matter to him, very much. Now my job is played and we are quiet. Here ends the episode and I suppose you would excuse me, darling

for not letting you know in the beginning. That is the story.

Well, Siva dear, what do you think of it? Did not Menon deserve it? Richly I should think, though at present I don't bear any ill-will towards him. Poor chap and good luck to him in other ventures.

I wish, Siva, that you wrote to me oftener for now I am in a great vein for writing and your writing to me would naturally call for replies.

How is your dear Ma and your other friends? I wish I could visit you again.

Your loving Leela.

That was Leeltvati's representation of the matter. It was fairly correct except for one detail which she omitted by design with the commendable object of not letting herself look ridiculous. It was the reply Mr Menon sent her from the railway station. In the left corner of her note he just wrote:—

'Thank you. Good-bye.—*G.M.*'

IX

On the 24th May morning Sivakami rose up from her bed, only from bed and not from sleep, for she had been keeping awake for a pretty long time. She lazily walked up to her toilet table and looked into the mirror at her thinner and care-ceased face. Mournfully she stood there for a while and then tossing her head defiantly at some thought she left the room. When she came back it was nearing noon and she had an unopened envelope in her hand. It was thick and the writing on it was studied to avoid illegibility. It was from Leelavati and Sivakami sat on a chair to open and read it. She sat, turned the cover over and over again in her hand, looked at the postal mark, at the stamp, and at the spilled drop of ink above her name. She was afraid to open the letter; it might contain the only news which she did not want to hear. Her heart palpitated. If the thing were to happen it would be because of herself only. The result would be unhappiness to them both ever after. Poor boy, she had driven him off because of her pride and unsympathetic heart! What would become of her next? She had found the thing for which, she had been craving, but she had found it only to love; she found it only after losing it. Oh, what stupidity!

Her fingers twitched to tear open the cover but her heart was afraid. This letter had come to confirm all her fear. She had not enough courage to read it, and Leelavati had written it, the girl whose presence in her memory had made her rashly challenge him. Nevertheless it was all due to herself and hating herself and tired of everything about her she threw the letter vehemently on to the table, and it knocked two bottles of cream down on the floor. But she was too depressed and angry to notice it; she cried with her face in her hands, her breast heaving with tormenting sighs and sobs.

After a while she heard her mother calling her and she rose up and hastily wiping her face came downstairs. Mr Das was waiting for her.

'Why are your eyes red?' he asked her.

'Been crying?' She just shook her head.

'You ought not to cry, little girl,' he said patting her. 'Crying spoils your eyes. What have you got to cry for? Aren't you beautiful and don't you get everything? You have got to cheer me up, you know, dear.'

She nodded. After an hour of chatting he left.

In the evening Sivakami was gay and laughing and talking endlessly that her mother looked at her with suspicion. But Sivakami had not yet read the letter. Mr Krishnaswami called and Sivakami talked with him almost flippantly.

'You don't seem to come here as often as you used to,' she said to him.

'Indeed, I do!' he protested.

'No, you don't,' she replied. 'I am afraid you are beginning to forget me. Perhaps you have left off admiring me also.' Her mother was not in the room.

'I admire you always,' he said.

'I don't believe it!'

Mr Krishnaswami proposed a visit to one of the picture houses and she readily agreed. She hurried and dressed. When leaving she dragged him to the door.

They found a comfortable sofa at the theatre, almost lonely, and they sat beside each other. The picture was an old sentimental story and except that, it had no other merit. It was punctuated with kisses.

'See how the fool is kissing her,' said Sivakami and Mr Krishnaswami thought she chuckled.

'He does not know how,' he replied. 'What love making!'

The electric fan was revolving above and Mr Krishnaswami was in a comfortable state of mind. He placed his hand on hers and softy pressed it. She laughed and withdrawing her hand struck his playfully. He moved closer to her and placed his arm on the sofa behind her back. He slowly let his hand fall on her shoulder but she neither moved nor protested in any manner. Cautiously he pressed her closer to him and yet she was quiet. With his other free hand he drew her hand in his and toyed with it.

'Making love, are you?' whispered Sivakami mockingly.

'Yes, why not?'

'Indeed, why not?' she laughed softly, but it sounded to Mr Krishnaswami's ear very much like a sob. He pressed her body closer to his and kissed her on the cheek nearest to his. She shook her hand and he laid it on his shoulders. She removed it but did not attempt to release herself from his clasp. After a while he whispered in her ears: 'Shall we go away?'

She just shrugged her shoulders and rose up. He followed her out of the theatre and in his car they drove to the Hotel C——.

'Come in,' he said and she walked in beside him without any hesitation. He took her to a room in the top floor and ordered refreshments. When they arrived he sent out the waiter and locked the door inside.

'You are very mischievous to-day!' she said.

'I like being so,' he replied.

He made her sit on his lap and she ate and drank from his hands.

'Bad boy, bad boy,' she said and he smiled; and her silliness would have been apparent to him any other time. She wriggled as if to escape but he held her securely and carried her to the inner room kicking open the door. He kicked back the door close, with her still in his arms and walked up to the bed and laid her softly on it. As soon as she came in contact with the bed, she seemed startled and looked around her. She was frightened. He was looking interestedly at her face. She attempted to rise but he stooped and held her back gently. She resigned herself without a murmur.

They were lying with their faces against each other, their eyes shut. Mr Krishnaswami had a growing sensation of something wet dripping on his cheeks. He opened his eyes and saw Sivakami crying silently. Her eyes were shut and tears were flowing, her nose and lips quivering. He shook her arm vigorously and she opened her eyes and looked at him.

'Why do you cry?' he asked her with some feeling.

'What do you care?' she replied pathetically. 'What does it matter if I cry or not?'

'It matters a good deal. It is the reaction?'

'My coming here itself was a reaction,' she said mournfully.

'Your coming here, a reaction?' he asked. She silently nodded her head. 'I thought you were too gay to be natural.'

'And you took advantage of it,' she said, almost reproaching.

'What if? I am also human', he replied. 'Well, what was the reaction due to?'

'I was a fool.' But he did not reply.

'I was fool,' she again said, 'and I lost him.'

'Lost whom?'

She sighed. 'What will he think of me?' she murmured as if in a dream.

'Come along, explain, I don't understand you,' protested Mr Krishnaswami.

'What is the good in my telling you? What is done is done and could not be recalled.'

'Never mind. Tell me all the same.'

'That might pain you, if you really have any feeling for me,' she said.

'It does not matter if it pains me. At least it would relieve your mind if you talk.'

They were lying side by side facing each other, he with an anxious face for he really liked her, and she talked looking at him and yet faraway sometimes with a smile, sometimes with a sob, the tears trickling softly on, ceasing awhile as the lips uttered the words, half-inarticulate, someties mechanically or ruminating, and someties passionate and tragic.

'I always laughed at love but all the same I wanted to love somebody, prayed that somebody would love me. And when he came and told me that he loved me. . . .'

'Who was it,' Mr Krishnaswami interrupted though patiently.

'Govind!'

'Who is Govind?'

'Sir Menon's nephew, and he loved me and told me so.'

'Not while at the Red Hills?'

'No?' she shook her head. 'He did did not love me then. He never loved me before, he loved me only after that. From the beginning I liked him, he seemed so good-natured and frank, but I also knew that he was laughing at me. On that day he tried to kiss me and I was angry and frightened. I asked him if I were so cheap——'

'Poor girl!'

'So cheap for him to take me if he wanted me. Then you came and he went away. I hated him then for thinking so lightly of me, for trying to force me. All that night I despised myself for being so low in his opinion and the next morning he came to me, poor boy, he was carelessly dressed, his collar all wrong, his hair all awry and he looked so pitiable and—noble. But I hardened my heart and talked angrily with him and ridiculed him. He asked me to forgive him, he begged me, and I just laughed at him. I thought he was acting, trying to circumvent me in some other manner. I tried to be careful and I was only too clever.' A light smile played on her lips. 'I was too clever, then he told me, but I simply mocked. Even then he did not become angry, he was just quiet and submissive. He only asked me again and again not to pain him with words of doubt and derision. When I laughed he said, "Oh! don't laugh. You don't know how much you pain me!" When he asked me to believe him I replied if he believed himself? I taunted him and insulted him but he bore up all patiently. I wish he had grown angry and had even struck me. I would have come to my senses. But he was too good. I asked him from when he loved me. He replied that he loved me from the time I said, 'Am I so cheap.' I was angry with him for pitying me and said I was much obliged to him for pitying me. He said that he only loved me and pitied me. I wish he pitied me, pitied me now. I was too proud. Why should he not pity me? Pity me! Don't you pity me?'

He nodded his head and said Yes, but it did not reach her ear. 'Then I asked him if he had loved anyone before. I don't know why I asked him. I knew he once had an affair, quite long ago with a friend of mine. With this knowledge I mocked him and the love he professed. He confessed he had made love before as perhaps you make

now to me,' and smiling painfully almost cynically she continued. 'But he said that all these were mere fun. He was only playing with them, he said. But I did not believe him and asked him if he played with me also. When he told me he loved me and would love me for ever, I said he was flattering me. I drove him from word to word mercilessly and made him promise a test. As a proof of his love for *me* I—I— asked him to marry the girl with whom he had once been attached. Even to that he submitted. I told him that he had cheated her and had to make it good. He said that he would marry her if I wanted him to. I replied Yes not knowing what I was doing to him and to myself. He proposed to marry her, simply to prove to me that he loved me and hoped, poor boy, that I would love him a little, just a little, he said in return.'

There was a pause and she cried softly.

' He left the City and followed Leelavati.........'

' Leelavati ! '

' Yes, it was she. She had told me that when we were at the college. I wanted him to marry her and he went to her place. There he asked her to marry him. She wrote to me about it and how depressed he looked. She thought that he had become repentant and she consented to marry him. He also wrote to me before proposing to her and he tells me how much he loves her. He says that I am not to be blamed and that it was all his own fault and his irresponsible behaviour. What has happened does not matter, he says, and that he might as well be married to Leela or anybody else as far as I was concerned. He thinks I do not love him and it is impossible for me to love him. If only he were to know ! '

I wanted to call him back but at first pride prevented me and then when I had quelled my cursed pride it was too late. Two days ago I got Leela's letter that they were going to be married and I am undergoing torments from them. I deserve all and more. I despised and hated myself. Anything may happen to me and it does not matter at all. I have driven *him* away and everything is over with me. I am just to look cheerful and be nice to others——' she said hysterically. 'Das said so to-day morning.'

' It is indeed good to give happiness to others, whatever kind of happiness it might be, my child!'

'That is all I am for and I have smashed my own happiness,' she sighed. 'Today I grew reckless and did not care whatever happened to myself.'

'And I came across the way?'

'Yes! But I don't reproach you,' she patted his cheeks. 'But what am I to do?' she cried and pressing her face close on his, she sobbed.

After a while he pushed her gently back and taking her face in his hands said kindly 'Don't you think that you are making too much of it ?' A look of disappointment came into her eyes.

'I don't mean that!' he hastily continued, 'your case is not so hopeless, you know.'

'Nothing more hopeless.'

'No, wait. If you love him so much you can get him back,' he said.

'How?' she asked eagerly.

'There are many ways,' he said vaguely.

'Yes!'

'At least there is one. You can ask your friend Leelavati to release him. Of course, she would if she does not care for him.'

'The idea never struck me. I might ask her. But to-day I received a letter from her.'

'What has she written ?'

'I don't know. I didn't read it. I was afraid to.'

'No, you ought have read it. Who knows it might contain some good news for you ?

'But if the letter informs me of their marriage?'

'I don't think they would have married so soon. You can see her.'

Sivakami thought awhile.

'Yes, I will,' she said, 'I'll go to her and ask her to release him for my sake. I will pray to her, beg her'.

She rose and began hastily dressing. They both dressed and came out and all the time Mr Krishnaswami was curiously observing her.

While they were in the car he began the conversation.

'Your decision to ask Leelavati for him has set my mind thinking,' he said.

She waited for him to continue.

'If you love him so much as all that and supposing he also loves you the same way.'

'He does!'

'Yes, and if he does, do you think it is quite right for you to marry as I suppose that is your intention.'

'Yes it is. What of that?

'Don't think I am a cynic. I believe in love, even in such a great love as yours is. But I despair for it!'

'Despair!'

'Yes, despair. Love is beautiful; it builds up an ideal. But alas, the ideal is shattered when you marry the person whom you love!'

Sivakami did not quite understand him. She was thinking of going to Leelavati. At Sivakami Villa they parted.

Mr Krishnaswami the seducer, respected women.

X

The next day morning Sivakami woke up much refreshed and happy. She read Leelavati's letter and jumped over her (Leelavati's) wish portions and came to where she told her that she had refused Mr Menon. Her heart bounded her and when she finished it and she had forgiven Leelavati for keeping her in the dark and deceiving Mr Menon for she (Leelavathi) had given him up. Now he would be her own. The mistakes she had committed have been rectified. She was joyous and happy. 'Oh, Govind, Govind!' she cried in ecstasy. Then she slept speculating and woke up dreaming.

If what Leelavati wrote was true, she thought, Govind would have come to the city the day before and called on her. She felt certain that he would have come. But he had not. Strange suspicions came to her mind but she waved them all aside with love's optimism.

By nine in the morning she was waiting for him alone. She reminded her mother of a visit and sent her away for two or three hours. Then she sat on a sofa as she had sat before, reading a novel. Often she turned to the door.

At last Mr Menon came. He was dressed neatly and well but he did not seem to be so joyful as was his wont. He came to her and she rose up trembling all over. With a great struggle she calmed herself and asked him to sit down. Mr Menon noted that there was no mockery in her voice.

'I have come to tell you, Miss Row,' he said without even a ghost of a smile, 'the result of your test.'

'I know it already' she said. He looked at her for a moment.

'Oh, I suppose Miss Leelavati wrote to you.' A smile seemed to flash across his face. But he became serious at once. He looked at Sivakami as if expecting her to talk and then rose.

'Then good-bye, Miss Sivakami,' he said and turned round and walked to the door.

'Govind,' called Sivakami, 'don't go!' He whipped round and within a second was near her. 'I love you!' she said. He took her hand and kissed it long and fervently. He sat on the seat before her and they looked at each other long and fondly.

'Can you forgive,' she asked.

'Forgive! why!'

'For not trusting. . . believing you!'

'I was the cause of that!' he said falteringly. 'Will you, will you marry me?'

She looked with love at him and nodded her head.

So long they felt embarassed in each other's company but now they talked more freely. They talked of little things, of great things of love, and what they thought of each other. They talked of how they began to love. Every word from him was music to her and she heard and talked to him automatically while her mind was ringing with him in words.

Fastly the time flew but they were not aware of it. They were submerged in themselves. Suddenly there came a discordant note in Sivakami's mind. She wanted to talk about it to her lover. But she was afraid.

'I have something very serious to tell you,' she told him.

'What is it?' he enquired.

'I have been—I am—I am. . . . . .'

'Tell me, dear,' he encouraged.

'What sort of a girl would you like to marry?'

'No sort, I want to marry you only.'

'Suppose I am not quite the girl you think I am,' she said.

'I love you as you are and not as I think what you are.'

'But there is something more. . . . .'

'Let there be. I am not anxious to know, whatever you think you are, you are quite good enough for me.'

'But I wish you would know it before we are married.'

'Then tell me, dear.'

'*I am not a virgin*,' she said slowly articulating every word.

'Oh, is that all?' he said steadily.

'Will you marry a girl like that?'

'Yes, why not?'

'But, but, I thought—'

'You thought I'd be silly about it. I know life enough not to find fault with anyone for such things.'

'But. . .'

'None of us are saintly and it is no good to be saints. It is a good thing we are not. We are human beings and we could only behave as such. I don't see why a man or a woman should not have a 'fling'. We are controlled by humours and moods.'

'I thought you would object. . . . .'

'Object to what you have done before? How can I?'

'And even yesterday. . . . . .'

'What, yesterday?'

She felt as if sinking. 'I—I—had as a fling,' she blushed out.

His face darkened and he got up and walked about the room.

'What, yesterday? when you loved me?'

'I did not love him. I hated myself for sending you away. I was reckless and I threw myself on him.'

He came back to her.

'Sivakami, I never knew you loved me so much. How happy I am!'

'But what about that?'

'It does not matter. I thought you loved him and was disappointed. But it was not love that brought it about.'

'No!'

'It was rather because of your love for me! Poor girl, how much you have suffered!'

Sivakami could not first believe her ears. Often when thinking about her marriage she had thought of this. But she found to her happy surprise that Mr Menon was sympathetic and noble.

Soon Mrs Row came and they forthwith told her that they were going to be married. She was surprised but she gave her consent as she knew that Mr Menon had enough money and satisfactory prospects. She had always in-

tended that her daughter should marry and settle in life and when Mr Menon offered himself she was not a little pleased.

'We will make it a grand function' she said. 'It is an intercommunal marriage.' Sivakami persuaded her out of it.' Then Mr Menon took leave of them reluctantly.

Sir Menon and his lady were at first adverse to hear anything about the marriage, but were soon won over, at least sufficiently enough to give formal consent. They loved Govinda Menon and held him as their own son.

The marriage day came off early as the couple wished, and they were married with simplicity without any large crowd or obtruse ceremonies. Towards evening the couple were sent off. They had arranged to spend their honeymoon in the European fashion. Sir Menon had placed his suburban bungalow at their disposal.

*

It was nearing midnight and it was time for them to retire. Sivakami went in to change her dress and Mr Menon sat alone in the hall.

He thought of his past, his love, and Sivakami. He loved her, she was above everything to him. He promised himself he would be an ideal husband, never give her any cause to be worried or quarrel with her even once. How wonderful she was and how noble! He revered her. He worshipped her.

He roused himself up and looked at the clock. It showed half of an hour more than when she left the room. He wondered why she had not come back. And then she did. His thoughts came to a standstill. How could he? He was thinking of the night that was to follow. He felt abashed. How could he? He asked himself again and again. She was his ideal, his deity—and to spend the night with her. His face clouded. The thought made his body shiver and his limbs went cold. He had been with other women and what was the result? At the end he had always despised himself and hated them. Their forms and their looks had always been revolting to him, at least for a while. And how could he touch Sivakami and reduce himself and her to the same condition. He loved her, he worked her, she was divine and he shrunk from the thought for the night. If he loved her less he thought he would not have minded it, or if he had more sense he would not have married her. 'For marriage is intimacy and love is adoration'. The words came to his mind. He was a fool not to have thought of it before to have completely ignored it.

She also loved him and wondered how she felt it. Did she think about it? She would have, she could have—and himself in that light. He got up as if stung. He paced about the room. The thought was driving him mad, but soon he calmed himself and thought about it carefully. He felt he could not go through with it. He ought to go away! But how could he leave her? What other way was there? He decided firmly, almost fiercely.

He tip-toed to the bedroom and softly opened the door. It was empty. He entered it and closed the door behind him. His eye caught the couch and he turned his head away, his whole body shaking. He walked towards his room on the right, but turned round, tip-toed to her room. He stood outside for a minute and kissed the door and turned away. He entered his room and locking himself in walked to the table. He thought of writing a letter to her and go away. He took a sheet of paper from a small drawer and placing it before him on the table, pressed his pen over the paper and thought how to begin. His eyes wandered and he saw a cover on the table addressed as 'To my husband.' He took it hastily and opened it. There were only a few lines in it and before he finished reading it he knew she had anticipated him. It ran thus:—

'Dearest,

I love you and I can't stay. I will give my life rather than my love for you. We can *never* be as man and

wife. I love you and I leave you. Good-bye, darling. Siva'

He looked blankly before him. All the world seemed to go round. He wanted to do it and when she did it he was surprised. After a while he steadied himself, and went to her room. He opened the door and inside he saw the window drawn up. She had stepped outside into the garden and had gone away.

*

Her mother was surprised to see Sivakami, but inspite of her remonstrances and actual-life philosophy she refused to go back. In the morning she received a letter through a messenger.

'Dearest,

I came to my room last night to write you such a letter as you wrote, and go away. But I am glad and proud of you who fore-stalled me. What you say is quite true. It is impossible for us to live as husband and wife. I love you—Good-bye, Darling. Govind.'

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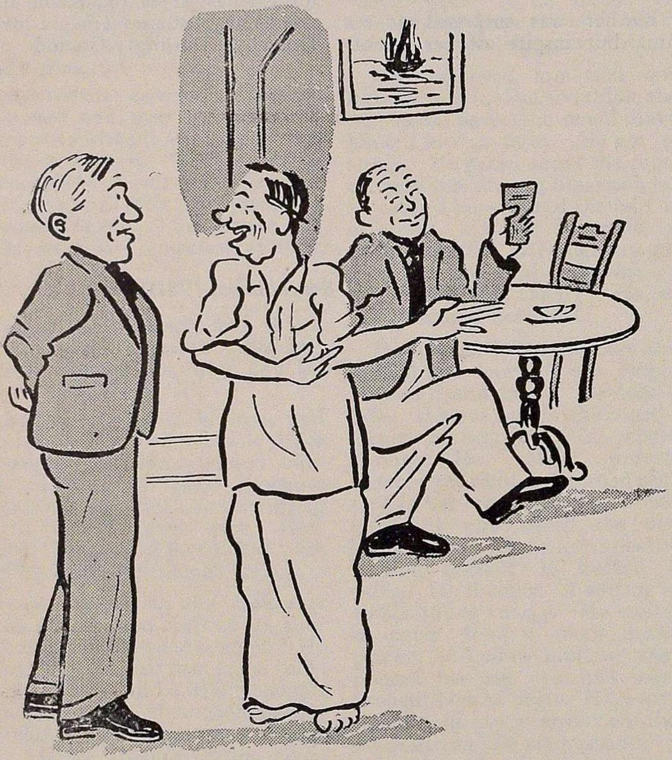
A PRACTICAL JOKE

By C. D. MINAKSHISUNDARAM

LEANING back in his luxuriously-upholstered twelve horse-power Austin, provided him by a rich and generous father-in-law, Mr Krishnaswami, Assistant Income-tax Officer, drove through the crowded bazaars of Broadway in search of refreshment. A hard day's work at the office had wearied him, and it was, therefore, with no little satisfaction that he got out of his car opposite a well-known 'fashionable' restaurant, stamped the unburnt end of his lighted cigarette under his foot, and briskly walked in, with an air of official nonchalance.

Immediately he went in, he was conducted by a sinister-looking, fat individual, with a deep scar on his face, to a seat in a corner of the hall, where already there was another "suited" gent, sipping his coffee and smacking his lips out of sheer delight. Mr Krishnaswami, the strict teatotaller that he was, gave orders for a glasss of that newly-invented drink called Mangola and some biscuits which tasted rather crisp—a



'He was conducted in by a sinister-looking individual!

quality he much liked, by the way and seemed, in keeping with his dignity, not to notice the individual opposite him. His worst fears were, however, confirmed, when the latter, putting down his cup on the exquisitely carved mahogany table, accosted him in the up-to-date urban style.

'Hallo, Kittu,' he cried out in the familiar patuois of an early time, 'mighty pleased to see you, old chap. Long since we met, eh ? What are you doing now, by the way, may I ask ? Do you know that. . . . Kittu had long since grown accustomed to such flippant talk from friends who casually met him and made all sorts of useless enquiries. Such questions bored him beyond measure, and his replies were always brief, terse, and strictly to the point. But, in the present case, he thought, his memory was playing him a strange trick, for was it not Ramu he was talking to—Ramu, the chum of his college days, Ramu whom he had obliged by a loan of Rs. 100 just prior to the Civil Service examination to pay his fees? . . Well, this was a god-send, and he would press him now to repay the loan.

'Hallo, Ramu,' he rejoined, 'so glad to have met you. you know, after all these years—why, it seems almost ages. I am just now as you may be aware in the Income-tax Department. My duties are most unpleasant I assure you. The public are always grumbling to pay their taxes. Well, let us not talk about it now. I hope you recollect the old times when we three yourself, myself and jolly Gopu—stood for election to the Union Society, when none of us, poor dears, had the ghost of a chance. By the way, I wonder what that blighter Gopu is doing now ? Any news of him, he ?'

'Oh yes,' replied Ramu, delighted at the progress of the conversation. 'The last time I heard from him was from Singapore, where from he wrote me, he was a sub-editor on the staff of the Malay Times getting 200 dollars a month. I expect he is doing quite well there, better than any of us chaps. My work as a lawyer, you know, though it does not bring me any additional income, brings me into contact with different classes of people. To-day, for instance, at six, I have got to preside over a boys' meeting. A pause, then (looking at his watch) 'Why, it is quarter to six, already. Will you give me leave to go, Kittu dear ?'

Kittu felt the psychological moment had arrived: the time had now come for him to act. He would, however, break the ice gently, as he knew that Ramu, being given to all sorts of stagey demonstration, would easily create a scene and collect a crowd in a moment. So he gently ventured, so as not to wound his friend's feelings—'Sit down, Ramu, there is still time for you. I wish to transact some important business with you. You remember surely that I loaned you Rs. 100 for your Civil Service examination fees, out of sheer generosity, without taking even a pronote from you. I was always wanting you, but heaven knows, you were not to be found anywhere under the sun. It is already two years now, and another year will see it time-barred. So, please pay up and help to restore the old friendly feelings that. . .'

Ramu could contain it no longer. The emotions waged a relentless warfare, and he felt he was the victim of a strange inferiority complex. But, no, he would assert once for all his prestige in the eyes of his friend. After all he had been no cad, and why should he try to appear one now? His purse was nearly always as full as Kittu's but, he reflected, the best way to humiliate Kittu was to play a practical joke upon him. Yes, he would do this now.

'Do not, for heaven's sake' he said, in a voice full of self-pity, ' misinterpret my motives. You know as well as I do, that I am the last person to cheat you of your money. Matter of fact, ever since I took that loan, I have always been wanting to repay it, but I could not get your address all right. I can pay back the amount now, if you want it.' So saying, he plunged his hand into his inner pocket, produced a cheque book and wrote out a cheque on the Modern Bank, which he handed over to Kittu in the most guileless style.

Kittu could see that he had annoyed his dear friend by his attitude, and so wanted to effect a reconciliation with him. The debt having been paid, there could now be no hindrance to the free intimacy of their college days, no obstacle to the cementing of the bonds of friendship, between them. So he began—, 'For goodness sake, please do not mistake my intentions. I did not mean to cast any reflections on your ability to pay. I knew you were a flourishing lawyer, and would pay up like a sport at any time. . . I am sorry I must go now, as I have to do some shopping. And the two parted with the best will in the world.

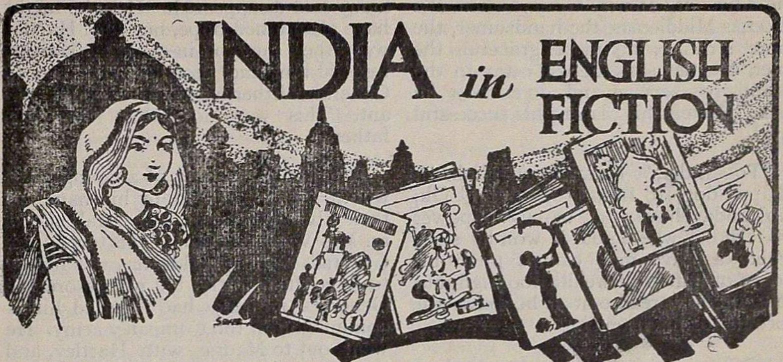
The next day, Kittu called his servant Munuswami, gave him full and detailed instructions, and sent the cheque through him to the Bank for getting it cashed punctually at 9 A.M., half an hour earlier than it opened its doors. Meanwhile, Kittu, in his great and unexpected joy, was seated on the sofa of his drawing room, whistling a favourite tune of his. The valet was expected any moment.

An hour later Munuswami arrived with a note with the inscription—

'What a fool he had been not to have asked for his address!'

'Cheque returned dishonoured—funds overdrawn.'

Kittu woke from his felicity. Was it a practical joke Ramu had played upon him in revenge, or was it the naked fact that, in spite of all his badinage about prosperity, he had actually overdrawn his account in the Bank ?. . . He wondered. . . And then what a fool he had been not to take down Ramu's address!



'So much has our intimacy increased with the oriental world that the transactions of Delhi are almost as familiar to us as those of Paris. . . For great exploits, you have in the old history of India, before Europeans were numerous there, the most wonderful deeds, done by the least possible means, that perhaps the annals of the world can afford.'—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

ALTHOUGH Colonel Mannering "Guy Mannering") had spent his youth in India and some of the flavour of the Nabob hung about him, the special mention of India in Scott is, in *The Surgeon's Daughter*, first published as one of the Chronicles of the Canongate in 1827, when Scott was approaching the end of his career. But the story is full of vigour. Scott turns towards his new field with keenness, and works out an extremely good story of hundred and fifty pages. Fifty years before, as he purported to have heard from his friend Colonel James Ferguson of Huntly Burn, the son of James Ferguson, the historian, shooting and stabbing were as common in India as even they had been in the Highlands. Anglo-Indians laid down their consciences at the Cape of Good Hope and were done with them for good and all. That was not the only romantic advantage. In the pages of Orme which Scott found delightful, every captain became an historic character. Clive, who turned in his early twenties from clerk to Colonel, was to be known henceforth to every schoolboy as the hero who won the British Empire. There was something also which caught the imagination in the strongly defined character of the different Indian races. India so became an admirable back ground for Scott's most highly coloured villain, a striking melodramatic personality born in unusual circumstances near the Border.

A runaway couple arrive in a Scotch village late on a winter's night; the woman is in a precarious condition and is left by the man with the local surgeon. In his house a handsome boy was born and the mother is forced by her father, who finds her there, to leave him with the surgeon, sufficiently, but not amply, provided for. He is known by the name of the village, Middlemas, and christened Richard. He grows up with the surgeon's own child, Menie Gray. The surgeon finally received him as an apprentice with another youth of the neighbourhood, Adam Hartley. The two are rivals for

the love of Menie Gray; when she chooses Middlemas, the handsomer, the more striking, the more graceful, the finer, Hartley says he will away to the Company's service, and do as best he can. He tells his plan to his successful rival.

'To India,' bursts out Richard, 'happy dog, to India! Oh, Delhi! Oh, Golconda! have your names no power . . . India, where gold is won by steel, where a brave man cannot pitch his desire of fame and wealth too high, but that he may realise it if he have the fortune for his friend!'

While, in spite of his happy love affair, he was still in this envious mood, a certain Tom Hilary, who had left a post as attorney's clerk in the neighbourhood five years before to take up employment under the Company, came swaggering back to the village, paying even his debts and giving a glowing account of what India had to offer. Vulgar minds soon turn hints to boasts when with those simple souls who take *omne ignotum pro magnifico*. So had the nabobs talked: 'Not a stream did he mention but flowed over sands of gold, and not a palace that was inferior to those of the celebrated Fata Morgana. His descriptions seemed steeped in odours, and his every phrase perfumed in attar of roses.' It was the cloudy inebriation which enticed Lyall's young dreamer to his Land of Regrets. Hilary's talk would turn from Hindu dancing girls with their movements of voluptuous suggestiveness towards haughty English conquerors, to the battles and sieges in which these heroes won their glory. Each officer appeared a Lawrence or a Clive, and wealth waited for the asking. Middlemas was soon carried away by these dreams, bade good-bye to Menie Gray, and started off with his new friend.

In the carousals of their first evening together, Middlemas found himself drugged, and before he regained consciousness was placed in a ward of people suffering from small-pox. The twelve hundred pounds of his patrimony had disappeared. Here he might have abandoned hope, but that Hartley was the surgeon-in-charge. Hartley rescued him and recommended him to General Witherington, the commandant. This was no other than his father.

The sudden advent of a young man whom she recognised by his name as their abandoned son, had fatal effects on Mrs Witherington. This turned the General's brain. Middlemas was forced to leave the country, but not before the General's influence had secured him a commission in the Compan'y army. He went out to Madras with Hartley, and though he began well, his pride, when Hartley had left for a more distant station, began to get the better of him. He challenged his colonel to a duel on a pretext of having been subjected to an insult. In this duel he killed his commanding officer. He was obliged to flee the British settlements, and he entered the service of a native prince.

Scott had hinted in the Introduction that he might have written more fully of India but that in fact he knew 'nothing whatever about it.' The last fifty pages of his story give a very different impression. The character of the Anglo-Indian swaggerer, whether a gentleman like Witherington or a scoundrel like Hilary, he has already shown that he knew pretty well; the unscrupulousness of the Company as it had been was an open book to him. He was aware that its administration in India had, at least before the times of Clive and Hastings been tainted by grave scandals and as Macaulay has pointed out in the case of Hastings, the first demand of the directors was for money. The scandals connected with their recruiting are in Scott's pages even more darkly coloured than those connected with the British pressgang as reproduced by Thackeray. But the novelist now gives a more sinister portraiture of the actual conduct of responsible Englishmen in India. With probably Sir Thomas Rumbold in his mind, he describes the 'President of the Council' at Madras as

"an able and active but unconscientious man, who, neither in his own affairs, nor in those of the company, was supposed to embarass himself much about the means which he used to attain his object.' A back stair was the 'necessary appurtenance of every Government' in India, and the great man carried on mysterious intrigues among the natives through his steward or *Dubash*. Paupiah, the Dubash in this story, was satanically efficient, a master of devilish designs, abandoning without scruple the happiness of the rich and the existence of the poor, the honour of men and the chastity of women, to attain a private or political advantage. Scott realised that he might seem to be traducing the Company's administration by the introduction of this malignant frauder as the principal agent of an Englishman in the highest authority, and remarks in a note (itself supposed to be scarcely necessary), that such things should only be acted in the earlier period of our English settlements, when the check of the Directors was imperfect, and that of the Crown did not exist. Paupiah was perhaps an anachronism; and the vagueness of his position is increased by the uncertainty who his master was; for he is described sometimes as President of the Council, sometimes as Governor. It was with this person that Richard Middlemas comes in touch when, after some years, he is returning disguised to Madras as the secret agent of Hyder Ali the Nawab.

But the story first relates to the adventures of Hartley. He had returned to Madras after three years and resumed his practice. There one evening he was sent by the Secretary of the Government to attend a certain Fakir named Barak-el-Hadji who lay at a Moslem shrine near by. It is now that the novelist displays his extraordinarily accurate knowledge of Indian scenes and Indian life. His painting is as vivid, his details as exact as when he is describing his own beloved Scotland. He loved description in a full, rather formal, style. He felt the greatest zest in touching on the 'glorious and unbounded subjects' upon which he, first among British novelists, had touched. He was intensely interested both in local customs and the romantic scene, and as he says, in the Preface, 'India is the true place for a Scot to thrive in.'

He shows us the white marble on Cara Raji's tomb and the devotees reciting the Koran day and night before it. These did not look up from their reading as Hartley approached and even the chief mullah, distinguished by the length of his beard and his large wooden beads, finished his enumeration of the holy names of God before he answered Hartley's enquiry. The doctor found the patient in one of the cells built around the Court of which the tomb was the centre. The Fakir conformed sufficiently to the habits of the wordly of his religion as still to wear the fez of taboosh of Tartar felt, and round his neck was a string of black beads. Physician and patient exchanged the flowery imagery of Persia in their talk, and the readers of British novels might learn that the sententious wisdom of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* was echoed by Mahomet's followers in India.

'It is Allah,' says Hartley, 'who chooses and enlarges the heart. Frank and Mussalman are all alike moulded by his pleasure.'

'My brother hath spoken wisely,' answered the patient. 'Welcome the disease if it bring thee acquainted with a wise physician. For what saith the poet —"it is well to have fallen to the earth, if while grovelling there thou shalt discover a diamond."'

The sick Moslem was indeed a secret agent of Hyder Ali, whom Scott describes as 'an able and sagacious prince' and one of the wisest that Hindustan could boast; who, though he could perpetrate great crimes to gratify ambition, could display instances not only of generosity, but of that rarer quality in oriental Princes, Justice.

After Barak-el-Hadji had recovered and returned to his prince's dominions, the Begum Montreville, a strange impressive creature whose European line-

age did not prevent her from assuming the dress and customs of a Mahomedan, appeared in Madras. Attendant on her was—Menie Gray.

The devoted girl had long considered how she might come out to her lover, and after her father's death she found herself with the means to obtain a passage. A letter arranging all the details of her journey had come from Mysore, and she had found herself in the train of the strange woman we have described. Intrigue was violent around her, she was in an equivocal position between Middlemas and the native Durbar, and had no safeguard other than her goodness. Hartley attempts to intervene and warn her, for his instinct told him that her danger was greater even than it seemed. Indeed, the Begum Montreville had conceived for Middlemas a violent passion; seeing that it was disputed by his old love in Scotland, the jealous woman had formed the idea of enticing the girl out and sacrificing her to Hyder's son, Tippoo. In this plan the courage of Middlemas fails, and his loyalty to his old honour and his love inclines him to turn traitor to the Begum and his Indian master. But the threats of the Begum overcame him.

As she began to understand her terrible position, Menie Gray contrived to send a message by a servant to Hartley. The young doctor would have employed the aid of Government, but was warned of what he might expect from Paupiah and his master. He went straight to Mysore therefore to throw himself on the merciful justice of the Nawab. Barek-el-Hadji found him an agent to press his suit. And having done all he could, he retired to watch the Begum's Company, with Middlemas, approach their rendezvous with Tippoo.

As Hartley had made his way to Hyder Ali he had come on one of those Indian scenes which had from earliest times struck the English imagination. When crossing a brook running through the jungle, they noticed a wretched-looking man, covered with mud and sores, sitting on a tiger skin. His eyes were fixed on a rude tomb, beside him lay a tiger skull and bones, and a sabre almost rusted away. Sadhu Singh, this miserable devotee, had once been a free booting soldier, and had been betrothed to the daughter of another freebooter who lived in the mud fort near by. The bride, mounted on a pony, was following the bridegroom and his friends after the marriage. As they approached the nullah, a dreadful roar, a shriek of agony, were heard. Sadhu Singh rushed back and saw a swaying movement in the long grass; he plunged towards it. When his friends came up with him they saw the tiger done to death by a violent blow on the neck, and the dead body of the bride was in his arms. There ever since the broken-hearted lover had remained, among the trophies of his grief and vengeance.

This touching story introduces a tragic suggestion into the quest of Hartley, and the memory of it underlies Scott's brilliant description of the ceremonious meeting between Tippoo Sultan and the Begum Montreville.

Outside the walls which protected the splendid bazaars of the city, waved the streamers of the Begum Montreville's encampment; towards this from the north of Bangalore, Hartley saw through dust a force of cavalry galloping forward with flashing lances. This was the vanguard of a procession of howdahed elephants and the royal banners dimly seen through the haze and movement, which poured a living torrent through the citygates and approached the palace of the Durbar. At noon next day a discharge of cannon announced that Tippoo had mounted his elephant, and the attendants, carrying silver sticks and clubs shouted at the top of their voices the titles and virtues of Tippo, strong as Rustum, just as Nushivran.

Tippoo, preceded by troops of cavalry and infantry variously caparisoned, himself rode in a silver howdah on an elephant, caparisoned in scarlet embroidered with gold. Behind him a trusted servant waved the chowry or cow's tail which kept off the flies. The courtiers

and officers of the household followed after, some on elephants and some on horses.

As the procession moved down the principal bazaar to the gate of the royal gardens, from every window was displayed a gailyworked cloth, or shawl, or carpet so as to produce an effect singularly rich and gorgeous.

Through a long avenue in the gardens on a marble chabutra or platform canopied with marble arches, a throne or cushion of crimson velvet was prepared. Before the chabutra was a marble tank filled with clear water, which was replenished from a fountain in the centre throwing up water to the height of twenty feet. To this the Begum approached, with Middlemas at her right hand, in a garb befitting the occasion. With them Tippoo exchanged compliments, and the criers, then announced that, as a compliment to the Begum, Tippo had taken Middlemans, her general, into his service, and entrusted him with the keeping of Bangalore.

A voice arose from one habited as a Fakir in the company of Barek-el-Hadji, with a loud curse on this arrangement.

But the ceremonial was quickly resumed and the Begum replied that, as an acknowledgment, she would hand over to the prince a lily from Frangistan (the lands of Feringhis or foreigners) 'to plant', as she said, ' within the recesses of the secret garden of thy pleasures.'

Again the voice was heard in solemn imprecation. ' Cursed is the prince who barters justice for lust, he shall die in the gate by the hand of the stranger.' But when Tippoo, infuriated, gave the command, 'Drag forward that Fakir, and cut his robe into tatters on his back with four chabouks', no one dared approach. The venerable man flung off his cap and his beard, and Tippoo's eye met the stern gaze of his father. A robe of royal splendour was flung over his shoulder, a jewelled turban placed upon his head, and he ascended the throne in the place of his son. He then announced his pleasure. The young girl was to be placed in safety under a trustworthy guard and go with Hartley towards Madras. As for the promises Tippoo had made to Middlemas let them be made good. He was invested with his new dignity; a white horse, the end of his tail and mane stained red, saddled in crimson velvet; the bridle and crupper studded with gold, was first given; and the second present, a state elephant, was led up to the newly invested Governor, who waited for the animal to kneel while he mounted the howdah.

At the signal of Hyder the situation changed. The elephant curled his trunk round the neck of the Britisher, and throwing him on the ground, stamped a huge shapeless foot upon his heart. Such was the end of Middlemas, of his life and his treachery. The blood of the English general's son spurted on to the white muslin robe of Tippoo Sahib.

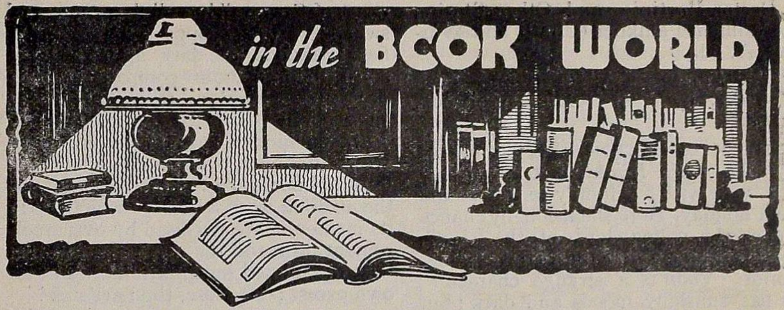
' Hyder acts justly,' was always the boast of the Nawab. He forgave the Begum since she had warned him of the plot. He had saved Menie Gray; but upon Paupiah and his master a more terrible vengeance was prepared. . . ' Tell Paupiah and his unworthy master, that Hyder Ali sees too clearly to suffer to be lost by treason the advantages he has gained by war. Hitherto I have been in the Carnatic as a mild Prince: in future I will be a destroying tempest! Hitherto I have made inroads as a compassionate and merciful conqueror—hereafter I will be the messenger whom Allah sends to the kingdoms which he visits in judgment.' With the devastating descent of Hyder Ali in revenge for the trickery that had been practised on him, Scott finishes the Indian part of his story. By that certain historic fact, the rest of his story may be orientated.

As for Menie Gray, she could not turn her thoughts from the agitating scenes she had witnessed to marriage with Hartley, before he died from a contagious disease which he was treating. The bride he had sought returned to her native village, and passed the rest of her life in acts of charity.

It is easy to gauge how far in this novel Scott enlarged current ideas of India. He spread the impressions first made by Orme and by Burke; he outlined a fresh the stains on the Company's administration; he pictured the blazing promises by which India had mesmerized the brains of young Britishers; but he did more than that. He is the only great British novelist who drew on India for romantic material, who brought home to the general reader in his native island an accurate idea of the splendour of Indian scenery, of the strange terror and fascination of her jungle, of the blaze of the princely procession as it passed through the ancient bazaars of the native city.

ROBERT SENCOURT

(*India in English Literature*)



INDO-ENGLISH

Chaff and Grain, by S. V. V. (New India Trading Co., Madras, Re. 1.)

Soap Bubbles [Third Edition], by S. V. V. (New India Trading Co., Madras, Re. 1.)

More Soap Bubbles [Second Edition], by S. V. V. (New India Trading Co., Madras, Re. 1.)

I AM reading S. V. V. since the days when he first began to blow his soap bubbles in the columns of *The Hindu*, those early days when speculation was rife that S. V. V. was none other than V. V. S.—Vivius or V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, author of some delightful dramatic divertissements. S. V. V. was soon discovered to be a lawyer at Tiruvannamalai! Everybody placed his finger on the nose and exclaimed: 'How improbable!' S. V. V. was a rage then and the Saturday *Hindu* was bought by persons who were reluctant to spend an anna on other evenings. That S. V. V. has not yet lost his hold is shown by his *Soap Bubbles* and *More Soap Bubbles* running into the third and second impressions.

Chaff and Grain is the third collection of the author's contributions to *The Hindu*. Some feel that S. V. V. has recently degenerated; that in his yet uncollected Marriage-series etc., he had begun to bore. But then they must be asked to see other attempts at such literature in our numerous magazines. He is our best writer in the lighter vein. English professors, syndicate members, and cynics may have opinions to the contrary; Mr K. S. Venkataramani is our best author of fiction, and S. V. V., our best author of the short humourous skit.

Chaff and Grain contains ten little sketches. Though uniformly entertaining, it is only sometimes that S.V.V. is capital, is rib-tearing. There are whole passages which do not draw even a smile; he thins and labours in artificiality. Keen observation, sense of humour, and a facile style are his undoubted gifts. Only he has moments like all other writers and artists. We may blow away the chaff and fill our mouths with the grain. In a short preface, the author tells us that inside these pages, some may find chaff and some grain but that the modesty in the name is only a pose. 'But between ourselves, to be honest, the modesty is only assumed. I fancy I have packed it with pearls.' Of the ten boxes in this display the sixth, labelled "A Visit to the High Court" surely contains pearls.

V. RAGHAVAN

ENGLISH

The Dark Island, by V. Sackville-West (Hogarth Press, 7s. 6d.)

The Huge Shipwreck, by Kathleen Freeman (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

Right Ho, Jeeves, by P. G. Wodehouse (Herbert Jenkins, 7s. 6d.)

The Best Short Stories, 1934: English and American, edited by Edward J. O'Brien (Jonathan Cape, 7s. 6d.)

Doctor Martinio, and Other Stories, by William Faulkner (Chatto and Windus, 7s. 6d.)

The Doomington Wanderer. A Book of Tales, by Louis Golding (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.)

SHIRIN LE BRETON, the heroine of *The Dark Island*, is taken every year with her family to the Island for a holiday. Here she meets by chance Venn, the young lord of the Island, aged eighteen and only two years her senior. Venn is a strange character; he has sunshiny moods and dark; but the dark moods are the darkest, boisterously Byronic. He makes love to Shirin who is terribly alarmed at the way in which he does it. For ten years the two do not meet and when they do, and that at a party, she is twenty-six, a divorced wife, and the mother of four children, the eldest being an imbecile. Her early and girlish passion for the Island and Venn's boyish and as yet undead desire for her unite the two; they are married. In the castle Shirin acclimatizes herself to live with her husband and his grandmother, an old whimsical and tyrannical creature, but the atmosphere grows sinister as Venn develops the sadistic side of his character. She finds help in her suffering in her secretary, Cristina; but it is only for a short time; the smouldering dark bursts and throws out its sulphuric contents. Shirin is chained to the iron rings in the cave stark naked,—the rings which had crushed the bone and chilled the blood of the wife of an earlier le Breton and which had fascinated her when as a girl she had holidayed in the Island. Her husband crouches beside her with a lash in his hand—the scene is one from a Greek tragedy. Revenge follows; is there a Judas? Tracey, Shirin's lawyer and faithful old Dog (every Beauty has her Dog, as Meredith says) alone understands it. But Venn's death does not free Shirin; his son proves her inexorable Nemesis.

The Dark Island is undoubtedly the work of a great poetic mind but it is not a work of art. The story which has its scenes in an island off the coast of Cornwall has all the surge and sweep of the choppy Atlantic; the fierce passions, the dark agonies of the spirit, the impetuous compassions and desires that build up this world reveal the strange personality of Miss West. But the hidden ground of austerity which her poetry conceals, her prose fails to conceal; in *The Dark Island* the medium is unsuited to the material; its incidents are sterilised by overmuch romanticism and the work of an otherwise disciplined imagination cries in its own excess: 'O Rose, thou art sick!'

Leaving *The Dark Island* we witness *The Huge Shipwreck*. The greater part of the action in this novel takes place at Broster, a girls' school and concerns with the lives and fortunes of four girls, Estella, Veronica, Sadie, and Cordelia. Estella, daughter of rich parents, is a lovely creature, silent, negative; and till the quality of self-possession matures in her, is a slave to the affection, love, adoration, and hatred of her friends. In the mental plane of the three elder girls young Toby Ungerville is ever present like a sprite in the Milky Way; Toby loves Veronica but she turns him away and Sadie's arms are ready to fold him in. Sadie and Toby are married but the young man sulks in her grasp, torments himself and torments others; the two come to stay with Estella and just when Estella succeeds in lifting Toby from the sulks she loses him.

Miss Freeman exercises great economy in the use of her words and in the character of Estella she presents a cameo of dreamlit youth. The other characters are mere shadows that pass; their speech is often inarticulate and inaudible and their motives inexplicable. *The Huge Shipwreck* is interesting in that it tackles a little literary problem but it is not for the study; in the bus, in the tram, or in the suburban electric train one can snatch hurried pleasant hours with it.

The wrecks have all floated away; the last of the ship is seen and when we turn round we see a familiar figure. It is the inimitable Jeeves. *Right Ho, Jeeves* is the latest Wodehouse triumph.

There is Gussie Fink-Nottle, Tuppy Glossop and company; newts and sharks and orange juice shaken into a cocktail. When Mr Wodehouse is exuberantly Wodehousian with his words he begins to bore one a little, but when he manipulates a quick series of incredibly funny incidents he is at his best and *Right Ho, Jeeves* which is rich in such incidents is a first-rate Wodehouse.

'Novel—A short story padded. The art of writing novels is long dead. Peace to its ashes, some of which have a large sale.' So wrote Ambrose Bierce, the short-story writer pure and simple, and one wishes with him that many of the modern novels were consigned to the flames. The short story in the present day has come into its kingdom and we are its thralls. Nobody has studied its growth and development so intensely as Edward J. O'Brien; no periodical, great or small, on either side of the Atlantic, has escaped his alert and critical eye; he began with an experiment and it has come to stay. From 1924 Mr O'Brien has given us every year regularly sheaves of his garnering rich alike in colour and variety. 'This year,' he writes in his Introduction to the volume for 1934, 'I have been tempted to try an experiment. The present collection sets side by side within the same covers the best English and the best American short stories which I have been able to find in periodicals during the past year. I appeal to the intellectual curiosity of the English public to compare the work of the two countries as exemplified in this book and to ask honestly this question: Is not the American short story much the more memorable, much the more vital?' He says that whereas the American short story is vital and of international interest the English short story is sterile and of insular interest; all form and no substance. Mr O'Brien is right; Miss Alice James confirms his view when she says in her Journal: 'England—This stifling land, where *form* is the god of gods!' Forty-two writers are included in the present volume and the choice is made for intrinsic merit. The English team is headed by Mr H. E. Bates with his story. "The Gleaner" reproduced from *The Woman Who Had Imagination*, which was reviewed in these columns August last, and some of the others are Janko Larvin, L. A. G. Strong, Romer Wilson, L. A. Pavey, James Stern. The American team is headed by Benjamin Appel with his "Winter Meeting," exquisite in theme as well as in treatment. William Faulkner, Dorothy McCleary, Morley Callaghan, Louis Mamet, who bring up the rear are some of the famous craftsmen in the field.

Incidents, swift and exciting, build up the stories of Mr Faulkner; he is at his best when treating of these; but when a psychological problem has to be tackled he is feeble and tottering in his method. Of the fourteen stories in *Doctor Martinio* "Turn About" shows him in his strength.

Mr Louis Golding of "Magnolia Street" fame is an accomplished novelist but the stories assembled in *The Doomington Wanderer* lack his characteristic sweep and vigour. In the form of a book these stories haven't the life which they would have if they were to appear in magazines from time to time.

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